

Writing on the Southern Front

Authentic Conservatism for Our Times

Joseph Scotchie



WRITING ON THE SOUTHERN FRONT

For traditionalists, the conservative ascendancy of the 1980s turned out to be a major disappointment. With the triumph of multiculturalism and political correctness, liberalism seemed to move from strength to strength. Still, a stout number of southern conservative writers plunged forward, and their themes of populism, immigration, and cultural integrity are seeing a contemporary resurgence. Discussing a wide array of authors who worked in a variety of genres, Joseph Scotchie celebrates those unreconstructed champions who fought the culture wars of their times with a special learning and vigor. Also included in this collection are creative artists who kept the flame of literature alive, providing visions of possibilities that only that genre can provide.

Joseph Scotchie is the author or editor of eight books, including *The Vision of Richard Weaver*, *Barbarians in the Saddle*, *The Paleoconservatives*, and *Revolt from the Heartland*. His work has won awards from the New York State Press Association and the North Carolina Society of Historians. A graduate of both the University of North Carolina at Asheville and the City College of New York, Scotchie has worked for three decades as a journalist in the New York City area.



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Authentic Conservatism
for Our Times

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FOREWORD

In *Writing on the Southern Front*, Joseph Scotchie confirms in two ways the view of his fellow-Ashevillean Thomas Wolfe that “you can’t go home again.” First, the author of this spacious anthology, who, among other things, celebrates his growing up years in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, cannot return to the Asheville of his youth. He is now living and working, with a family, as a journalist in New York City. But, equally relevant, the city he remembers and the past citizens of which he tries to save from oblivion have changed greatly since his youth and, in many cases, may no longer be recognizable.

Second, the southern traditions that Scotchie nostalgically evokes in this volume belong mostly to the past. Southern Agrarians, Confederate leaders, such as the Ashevillean Zebulon Vance, southern opponents of American involvement in foreign wars, and those figures of the American Old Right whom Scotchie knew are almost all gone. Thus there may be something of the necromancer’s art in his effort to call attention to figures whom the world of social media has totally ignored. Scotchie, like T.S. Eliot, is trying “to shore up against the ruins” memories and portraits that can still inspire us. Needless to say, he is not addressing American southerners in particular in these essays, for one could hardly imagine that these folks would resonate to Scotchie’s portraits more readily than other Americans of their generation. Scotchie has undertaken to salvage a part of the past that he thinks is worth saving, so that a future generation may rediscover it.

Moreover, he never gives the false impression that he is writing about figures whom he reveres as a totally neutral observer. Unlike many of today’s journalists, who pretend to be above taking sides when in reality they are deeply partisan, he openly declares his values and sentiments. He sympathizes with the American Right that took form in the twentieth century, and specifically with the culturally conservative Agrarians and their followers, who were active until the end of the past century. Even more significantly, Scotchie does not claim to be on

the “winning side of history.” He recognizes that what he admires about the American Right has absolutely nothing to do with its recent incarnations. Since the neoconservatives and establishment Republicans were allowed to occupy and reshape that movement, it looks less and less like anything that Scotchie (or this writer) would recognize as their political home. As his fans should know, Scotchie has written previous works on the American Old Right, which provide some indication of his general ideological inclinations. Among the most poignant essays in this anthology are those devoted to the now deceased advocate and theorist of right-wing populism Samuel T. Francis, and to one of Scotchie’s political heroes, Pat Buchanan.

But most of the essays in this anthology suggest the author’s other bent, which is literary. In his writings on Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, Richard Weaver, and M. E. Bradford, it is obvious that Scotchie delights in elegant literary style and memorable rhetoric. In his discussion of his southern subjects he writes quite gracefully, perhaps more so than when he is describing political movements and political personalities. I speak here as someone who has read Joe Scotchie mostly on the vicissitudes of the American Right. In the section of his anthology devoted to literary figures, he rises to the eloquence of those Agrarian men of letters whom he tries to keep alive for a future generation. By the way, I am delighted that a denizen of Bayside, New York, would exuberantly recount Lytle’s celebration of farm life in rural Tennessee, which we are told was, according to Lytle, “bounteous, harmonious and organic.” The same description would fit easily the Amish farming communities in my region of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The most surprising section of this collection for one who, like me, has read Scotchie mostly on political subjects, is “A Republic of Letters,” which includes tributes to various modern novelists. There we discover, among other things, the author’s enthusiasm for the novels and ideals of someone whom he characterizes as the “great American urban novelist,” Saul Bellow. With the possible exceptions of Francis and Buchanan, it is hard to find anyone whom Scotchie holds in such high regard as this Chicago Jewish writer of epic fiction. Scotchie is impressed that Bellow could turn out streams of brilliantly crafted works for more than fifty years. Indeed, Bellow’s last novel, *Ravelstein*, based partly on the life of the renowned professor of political theory Allan Bloom, came out in 2000, when Bellow was eighty-five. Scotchie’s favorite Bellow novel, however, may be his darkest, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970), which recounts the experiences of Artur Sammler, a Holocaust survivor who observes both the decaying urban life and the disintegration of his own family as he travels around New York City. Scotchie notes that the author of this and other unforgettable novels befriended a multitude of struggling young writers and “spent no less than sixty-five years in the classroom teaching the classics of the Western canon.” One of the many merits of this collection is that its author never hides his genuine admiration for his subjects.

—Paul Gottfried



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INTRODUCTION

The Search for an Authentic Conservatism

The essays collected here discuss writers who worked in a variety of genres—fiction, poetry, criticism, history, biography, philosophy, and polemics—all of which place an emphasis on regaining traditional mores and behavior, seen by them as necessary for both the health of the soul and of the commonwealth. The bulk of this volume concerns authors who, for the most part, have been central to the culture wars of modern times.

Part I

The southern tradition (a theme of “Writing the Southern Front”) is not the only influence on the conservative movement. But it has proved durable enough to inform conservative thinking, not just since the 1950s, but also going back to the early 1930s. Key to that has been the Fugitive-Agrarian movement that started at Vanderbilt University as a bid to infuse American verse with the techniques of modernism as practiced by T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. With the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, the Fugitive movement entered its Agrarian phase, now a critique of industrialism and mass society countered by a rousing defense of the Jeffersonian vision of small landowners. This volume contains essays on key figures of that era: Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, plus those on the leading disciples of the Nashville Twelve: Cleanth Brooks, Richard M. Weaver, and M. E. Bradford. Even though the Agrarians have been derided, often among conservatives, as history's losers, their examination of what constitutes the worthwhile life has made them an ongoing source of scholarship. With Wendell Berry, also the subject of an essay here, there is the full fruition of this prodigious literary movement. Berry does not consider himself a disciple of the Agrarians or a partisan southerner of any sort, but it is impossible to separate

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his work from that of the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*. Agrarianism, to Berry, is not a metaphor for anything. Such husbandry is the real thing, with man and wife fully joined in the “country of marriage.” Certain themes emerge: localism, adult responsibility, men fulfilling their duties, in the process making for healthy, bountiful communities.

The Agrarians had some triumphs on the cultural front. The New Criticism, championed by Brooks, Warren, and Tate, eschewed social commentary, placing, instead, an emphasis on the rhetoric of any text, a view that once dominated English departments in Europe and America. The conservative southern tradition did not fare as well in the political arena, especially in the decades after World War II. Still, an examination of that tradition, included in two essays here, “Anti-war Southrons” and “Southrons First,” reveals some surprises. Although the South has a reputation, springing from the legacy of Andrew Jackson and James Polk, for hawkishness, there has always been a strong antiwar tradition. That reached a peak during the Vietnam War era, when Senator William J. Fulbright (D-AR) articulated his opposition to that war, not to mention an “arrogance of power” that he felt marked too much of recent American foreign policy. Fulbright’s assertion that the United States should not quarrel with the internal affairs of any nation provided that such nations do not have designs on the United States resonated strongly with the rejuvenated Old Right of the 1990s. Later, the foreign policy of both Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) and his son, Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), carried a strong libertarian streak into the debate. Not only do countries like Iraq pose no threat to the United States, such wars are a terrific drain on the U.S. economy. This view is not dominant among conservatives, but it does exist. Since the South has moved from the Democratic to Republican Party column, a look back at the long-vanquished Southern Democrats is also worthwhile. Fidelity to the U.S. Constitution in the face of judicial fiat was a hallmark of such men as Senator Richard Russell (D-GA) and Senator Sam Ervin (D-NC). There, too, was the definition of a political body as more than a set of laws. It also represents an organic unit, with a common culture, language, and heritage. That explained the opposition of such men to the 1965 Immigration Bill, which allowed, for the first time in the nation’s history, for mass non-European immigration into the United States. History has not been kind to such men, but their worldview does represent a political philosophy that, too, has influenced a renegade conservatism that emerged once the Reagan era had ended.

Part II

By the late 1980s, the Cold War was over as well. A new conservatism was struggling to be born. Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and Andrew Lytle all distinguished themselves not just as authors but also as editors: Brooks and Warren with *Southern Review*, Tate and Lytle with *Sewanee Review*. Such is true also of Russell Kirk and Thomas Fleming, two of the authors discussed in

“Towards a New Conservatism.” Kirk was a founder of *Modern Age* and long-time editor of *The University Bookman*. Both publications were similar to the ones edited by Brooks, Warren, Tate, and Lytle in that the emphasis was on literature and culture. Thomas Fleming’s tenure at *Chronicles* also focused on such themes, but it was central in creating the paleoconservative counter-movement to the dominant neoconservatism of the 1980s and beyond. By the 1990s, not just Kirk and Fleming, but other authors in Part II—Clyde Wilson, Chilton Williamson Jr. and later, Thomas E. Woods Jr.—had been marginalized, if not banished, by the now-triumphant conservative movement. The worldview of Fleming, Wilson, and Williamson, plus those of Patrick J. Buchanan and Samuel T. Francis, broke with an established conservatism on the globalists’ issues: opposition to mass immigration, both legal and illegal, the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and especially the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The conservatism articulated by these authors is about more than policy issues. Its leading lights have displayed a deep knowledge and appreciation of the Western tradition in literature, history, philosophy, and theology. The most prominent example remains Kirk’s *The Roots of American Order*, which lays out the case for the Western tradition—that delicate mixture of faith and piety, art and reason, community and individual integrity—as the model of ordered liberty.

There is also a robust celebration of the nation’s vital regional cultures as a diversity worth nurturing: the Upper Midwest of Russell Kirk, the South of Clyde Wilson, and the Rocky Mountain states of Chilton Williamson Jr. Paleoconservatives have sympathy for the America First movement of the early 1940s, especially from such authors as Garet Garrett and John T. Flynn. There is also admiration for the Republican Party of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Disillusioned by both the cost and carnage of World War I, Americans, in the 1920s, had a real desire to look inward, to seek an age of normalcy. Those two administrations obliged with a trade protection policy that allowed American industry and American agriculture to boom along, and immigration restrictions that gave an immigrant-weary nation a break from large-scale European influxes. In addition, they rejected the League of Nations, which many Americans felt would involve their country into an unnecessary military alliance, including using U.S. troops to assist Great Britain in the latter’s problems of empire. Americans didn’t want to see their sons dying in the cause of maintaining the British Empire in, say, Constantinople. In Part II, I have included essays on both Jesse Helms and Enoch Powell: Helms for the way he fought the culture wars of his time with great vigor and Powell over the immigration question. That issue is where paleoconservatives, in the late 1980s, first made their mark. Before that, it was Powell’s legendary 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech on immigration that broke ground on the formerly taboo subject.

An essay on James Burnham is also included in Part II. Burnham influenced many paleo writers. (In 1983, he was the first recipient of the Rockford Institute’s Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters.)

Parts III–IV

Most prominent among these paleo writers are the two authors in Part III and Part IV. Samuel Francis was Burnham's first biographer, while the latter's 1964 classic, *Suicide of the West*, had a similar impact on the thought of Patrick J. Buchanan. The authors in Part II have been expelled from the precincts of the respectable right. So, too, was the case of both Buchanan and Francis, the latter of whom died of an aneurysm in 2005. I include their work in separate dedicated parts because they stand alone as the most articulate and penetrating conservative pundits/scholars of the postwar era.

Part III has Buchanan's worldview on full display: economics, foreign policy, the culture wars, the struggle for the Christian West, plus a revisionist history on where the West went wrong in the war-plagued twentieth century. Buchanan has been compared to Oswald Spengler in that a possibly tragic fate of the West is the central theme of his work. What separated Buchanan from such contemporaries as William F. Buckley, Jr. and George F. Will is a sense of urgency: low fertility and rising immigration can bring down Europe and North America. A loss of Christian faith—man now not living for others, but instead for himself—leads to a shallow existence, including that same low fertility. Buchanan's critiques, as with those of Fleming and Wilson, leads also to a scathing indictment of the Republican Party as a tone-deaf exclusive men's club more concerned with Big Business donors than the working-class and middle-class constituencies that gave Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan their landslide victories.

That, too, is a criticism made often by Sam Francis, an essayist who wrote with the same sense of urgency as Buchanan. Francis's books, however, are generally essay collections. Unlike Buchanan, Francis, by the 1990s, had broken entirely with the term "conservative" itself. (This recalls M. E. Bradford's pithy observation that to be a conservative in our age is to merely "perpetuate the outrageous.") A resident of the Washington, D.C., area, Francis, this time like Buchanan, looked to those Middle America Radicals (a term first coined by the political scientist Donald Warren), as a lifeline in combating the Left. Francis spent his career trying to awake the silent majority that he hoped would organize and eventually wrestle power from an arrogant ruling elite. Conservatives are generally optimistic about American institutions, counseling certain reforms to correct societal ills. Francis, on the other hand, was far more blunt. "The first thing we have to learn about fighting a culture war is that we are not fighting to 'conserve' something; we are fighting to overthrow something," Francis declared in a 1993 speech. "[We] must understand . . . that the dominant authorities in the United States . . . not only do nothing to conserve . . . our traditional way of life but actually seek its destruction or are indifferent to its survival. If our culture is going to be conserved, then we need to dethrone the dominant authorities that threaten it."

If it couldn't happen through a third party, then maybe it could happen through a concentrated activism that would force politicians to dance to a

populist tune. Buchanan and Francis, to me, were touchstones of integrity. Both men spoke with an intensity generally lacking in the triumphalist post-Reagan conservative era. As important, their worldview, as with so many others represented in this volume, now resonates significantly through a populist revolt by an anxious body politic in both Europe and America.

Part V

This collection ends on an aesthetic note. As the columnist William Murchison maintains, there's more to life than politics. And so, Part V concerns novelists, poets, and critics, many of them famous, plus others who deserve more exposure to the public. These artists are traditional storytellers who have rejected the black humor and cynicism of the postmodernist age, opting instead for direct encounters with the carnival of American life. A culture sustains itself through non-materialistic things: music, cuisine, manners, codes of conduct—and through literature. Creative works give us a correct vision of man's dual nature—his capacity for both good and evil—plus, they contain a thorough history of the times the authors have lived through. A people can't live without storytellers, and (pessimism over an age of head-spinning technology aside) this art form, as these authors illustrate, will always be with us. I grew up with such contemporaries as Saul Bellow, John Updike, and J.D. Salinger. Plus, I believe that Richard Price and the late Larry Brown are the two finest fiction writers America has produced since the 1970s. The working-class world that both men depict comes with an intensity that is often lacking in the middle-class novel that has been central to postwar American fiction. I include both T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway since the modernist era was so influential in the post-1945 world. As with Brown, David Foster Wallace left us much too soon, but his expansive works breathed fresh life into American fiction. If Price and Brown are two great novelists of the past four decades, then Mark Royden Winchell occupies that same space as a critic.

The southern front is just one expression of the American literary and political experience. But it speaks in a universal language. If there is a search for an authentic conservatism, it is one for the “small-c” conservative variety. It is not interested in programs but in continuity. Andrew Lytle's vision of a republic of families, one free from an overbearing state, would resonate with these authors. So, too, would Wendell Berry's definition of culture as a living, enduring thing. Or, as he writes of his own Kentucky family in *Life Is a Miracle* (pages 151–153):

Who knows the meaning . . . and the practical value of this rural family's generational procession across its native landscape? . . . No one person will ever know all the answers . . . I am the one who (to some extent) knows, though I know also that I cannot tell it to anyone living. I am in the middle

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now between my grandfather and my father, who are alive in my memory, and my son and grandson, who are alive in my sight. If my son, after thirty more years have passed, has the good pleasure of seeing his own child and grandchild in that procession, then he will know something like what I now know. This living procession through time in a place *is* the record by which such knowledge survives and is conveyed. When the procession ends, so does the knowledge.

PART I

The Southern Tradition



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I.1 Why They Hate Thomas Jefferson

(1998)

Thomas Jefferson is America's favorite whipping boy. Not among the public, which remains either ambivalent or blissfully ignorant of most history. But this certainly is the case among the jealous elites. Nowadays, Jefferson is even more despised than such longtime bogeys as Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon. It's quite a sight. There is always that psychological need for a scapegoat, for the "other" to keep on hand as a reliable villain. If America is a failing republic, then the road leads back to such Founders as the unsuspecting Thomas Jefferson.

We all know the official motive behind the attacks. I'm not buying. There are deeper reasons for the hatefest beyond abstract notions of equality. Put simply, the Left can no longer claim Thomas Jefferson. So now they must destroy him. This wasn't always the case. In 1943, Franklin Roosevelt presided over the unveiling of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington. With that event, a new era of Jefferson-worship among liberals began. This was an age when the New Deal had been given a second life by World War II. Liberalism ruled supreme. Jefferson, according to Merrill D. Peterson, now stood for "ideals of beauty, science, learning, and conduct." All of which, through massive federal spending programs (money for education, science, "the arts," and federal control of public school systems), would be enhanced in the postwar golden age of big government.

Times have changed. In the 1950s and '60s, faith in the federal government to do the right thing "all of the time" ran high. Up to 70 percent of Americans placed their blind trust in the feds for dealing with the nation's social and economic ills. By the late 1960s, all that was over with. In the nation's capital—plus countless other cities large and small—Americans could no longer walk the streets or send their children to public schools. Further, their sons were fighting and dying in an unwinnable war. Juvenile sentiments about a benevolent federal government had disappeared. Now, few Americans have any abiding trust in the federal government. Worst of all for the liberal elite, active antistatist, pro-constitutional movements have sprung up throughout the country. Although thwarted by the Republican Party's latest retreat from principle, such movements can be expected to rise again when the next economic or social crisis erupts.

Thomas Jefferson's political philosophy is to blame for all this. To its horror, the Left realizes Jefferson was no big-government man—nor can he ever be transformed into one. During his presidency, Jefferson cut the size of the federal government by thirty percent—an unheard-of sum by today's standards. His whole philosophy was not just antistatist but aggressively agrarian, and in favor of those little platoons that sustain families and communities. "What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun?" Jefferson once wrote to a Virginia congressman while providing his own answer. "The generalizing and concentrating of all cares and powers into one body, no matter whether of the autocrats of Russia or France, or of the aristocrats of the Venetian senate."

For instance, not just giving sovereignty to the statehouses, but dividing counties into “subdivisions of wards” was Jefferson’s model for self-government. Consider further his vision of liberty. Counties, as he wrote in his only book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, should only be “twenty-four miles square,” while wards would be even smaller.

[They would be an] average of . . . about six miles square each. . . . In each of these might be . . . an elementary school . . . a company of militia . . . a justice of the peace and a constable . . . each ward should take care of their own poor . . . their own roads . . . their own police. . . . Each ward would thus be a small republic within itself and every man . . . would thus become an acting member of the common government. . . . The wit of man cannot devise a more solid basis for a free, durable, and well administered republic.

Citizens of the ward, not far-off bureaucrats or unelected judges, would be solely responsible for the fate of their communities. Would our “big-government conservative” friends with their dreams of “national greatness” go along with this arrangement?

Jefferson was not the only prophet of radical decentralization. Patrick Henry comes first. (“The father of all that is characteristic in Southern politics,” as M. E. Bradford described him.) Virginia’s fertile climate also gave us John Randolph of Roanoke and John Taylor of Caroline. These giants were later complimented by John C. Calhoun, hailed as “the last of the Founding Fathers.” Unlike Jefferson, none of these gentlemen were ever influenced by the egalitarianism of the French Revolution. Still, Jefferson’s link to Henry, Randolph, and Calhoun provides another reason for the Left’s hatred of the man. All were intellectuals, well learned (often on their own), fluent in several languages, prolific with the pen. Jefferson’s standing as America’s greatest (and most interesting) intellectual cannot be challenged.

These days, however, coastal America is more dominant than ever. All intellectual life in America, it seems, must flow from there, down to the public school system, other colleges and universities, network news programs, corporate-owned newspapers and magazines, the foreign-owned publishing houses and movie studios. A conservative tradition, with its emphasis on orthodox Christianity, decentralization of government functions, and love of a tragic past remains feared and despised by the ruling elites. Folks with one foot in the past stand in the way of a future made by ever more bizarre experiments in social engineering.

So let *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* rant and rave. The rest of us can honor Jefferson by living up to his legacy. Repealing over 100 years of centralizing trends is a task for the ages, but already plenty of good people have made the effort. On the education front (always a key concern of Jefferson), there has been the proliferation of charter schools, religious schools, and home schooling. The attack on Leviathan may be aided by a younger, more cynical

generation that has no use for the cradle-to-grave welfare state. One of those revolutions that Jefferson felt was necessary “from time to time” may take place only after the welfare/warfare state collapses under both the weight of its own excesses and the expectations of a decadent people. For now, Jefferson’s brilliant vision of liberty stands like a reproach on a conquered people.

I.2 Robert E. Lee

The Unvanquished General Lee

(2007)

The year 2007 promises to be like no other, for it represents nothing less than the bicentennial of Robert E. Lee. I won’t bore you with tales of political correctness. We all know the days are evil. Not surprisingly, Lee, along with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, is a main target of the malcontents. To others, Lee is not so malevolent. Rather, he remains a strange figure, a man out of place in American history. He is forever the Man in Gray, the man of a different uniform in a nation defined by progress unlimited. There’s no room for tragedy in this America: defeat, occupation, poverty—Americans would rather not think about it.

Lee is not forgotten—at least to those who look hard enough. There are Lee Counties in ten southern states. (The “Lee Counties” in both Georgia and Virginia are named for his father, Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, the famed Revolutionary War cavalryman.) There are eighty-plus schools—and not all of them in the South—that bear his name, not to mention those streets, boulevards, parkways, plus the numerous monuments in his likeness, especially Stone Mountain, the largest outdoor sculpture in the Western Hemisphere. A previous generation was nostalgic for life “befoah de wah.” Me, I’ll take life before the Interstate, when the Old Lee Highway, the Jeff Davis Highway, and the Dixie Highway were the main byways running through the Southland. For the Old South, Lee was an icon on which folks could nurse their wounded pride. The South lost—but look at what men it produced. In that age, from 1876 to 1941, the first great bulk of Lee scholarship was being produced. Starting in modern times, around the 1930s, Lee became a puzzlement to some. Biographers, novelists, poets, and historians have all struggled to “get Lee right.” Robert Penn Warren thought that Lee was too smooth, too refined a character to ever be a subject for fiction. Warren’s fellow Agrarian Allen Tate quit a planned biography of Lee in frustration: he thought Lee was too image-conscious (to borrow a modern term) to gather much sympathy. For decades, ambitious historians have sought to upend Douglas Southall Freeman’s contention that unlocking Lee’s true nature—specifically his ceaseless devotion to Christian morality—involved no great mystery.

Is understanding Lee that hard? Lee was stoic like the Romans, but that was the way of the gentleman. He was human, plenty human. Lee’s life was marked by great ambition and legendary victories, only to face enormous frustration and, finally, defeat. He was, in his own words, a man “always wanting something.”

Lee was reared in Alexandria, Virginia, at a time when the legacy of George Washington dominated the local culture. Lee's father, sent into exile for failing to meet his debts, was a friend and contemporary of Washington. Lee grew up idolizing the Father of Our Country. As fate would have it, Washington's adopted granddaughter also lived in Alexandria. The families were acquainted with each other. And you just *knew* that Lee would marry Mary Custis. One can imagine the young Lee laying eyes on her and resolving right there to marry her. You'd almost like to be a fly on the wall for that courtship.

In his youth, Lee also cared for his aging mother. He burned equally to redeem the family name. At West Point, Lee would become one of the few cadets of that august institution to graduate without receiving a single demerit. After West Point, Lee began his life on the road. The coming decades would see Lee stationed, at among other places, Savannah, St. Louis, Brooklyn, and West Texas. Frustration followed ambition. Lee disliked being away from his family, even though he had no real home. Arlington, the mansion where his children were reared, was in fact the home of his father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis. In between West Point and Fort Sumter, there was the Mexican War, a conflict in which Lee served with great valor and vigor. His performance caught the eye of General Winfield Scott, who now declared Lee to be the finest soldier in the entire U.S. Army.

Lee, of course, opposed secession, even labeling it as a "rebellion." "The only song I long to hear is 'Old Columbia,'" he exclaimed as the Deep South seceded. However, wearing the blue and invading Virginia was asking too much. You had to wonder what the boys in Washington were thinking. "Having plowed her fields, he had a new sense of oneness with her," wrote the perceptive Freeman of Lee's special attachment to the Old Dominion. In addition, Lee during the war became convinced of the South's rightness in not just moral terms but constitutional ones as well.

And so came Lee's greatest challenge, greatest glory, and greatest frustration. Lee excelled through those lightning-quick offensive operations, the ones with Jeb Stuart conducting cavalry rides around the opposition, Stonewall Jackson striking the first blow, and James Longstreet's forces delivering the decisive follow-ups. After Jackson fell at Chancellorsville, Lee still took the offensive at Gettysburg. After that epic battle, Lee assumed a more defensive posture, one that kept U.S. Grant's mighty forces at bay all throughout 1864. I am not a military historian. I would add only that the Western theater was important, too. Jeff Davis's decision to relieve Joe Johnston in Atlanta with John Bell Hood was as significant as the loss of Jackson. Hood abandoned Johnston's successful defense of Atlanta for a heroic but ill-conceived assault on Nashville. The Army of Tennessee was lost at a time when Lee's men were still in the field. Plus, there is the story of Nathan Bedford Forrest and all the missed opportunities.

So why Lee? There is that constant fascination with the underdog, with Lost Causes, with how the losing side manages to endure. There also was Lee's conduct, both during and after the war. He did win great battles against enormous

odds. Plus, Lee was magnanimous in victory. He did not gloat or brag when a major battle was won. He knew the odds under which his army struggled and the cruel reality of war that robbed thousands of young men of life at an early age. He referred to Federal forces as “those people” and even at times, “our friends.” Finally, in defeat, Lee was regal. At Appomattox, he dressed to the nines, while Grant showed up late, chomping on his ever-present cigar and wearing only a colonel’s uniform. One can only recall James R. Robertson’s unforgettable description: “[It] was one of those rare moments in history when the vanquished commanded more attention than the victor.”

After the war, Lee’s demeanor changed little. There was anger in private, the conciliatory stand in public. “How that great heart suffered,” his son Robert Junior observed. There was more, however, to his postwar life than melancholy. At Sulphur Springs, Lee confided to Fletcher I. Stockdale, a former governor of Texas, that if he had foreseen the ravages of Reconstruction, he would not have surrendered, but instead died with his men right there at Appomattox. Indeed, at Washington College, where Lee served as president, he was truly a man without a country. The descendant of two signers of the Declaration of Independence, the son of a governor of Virginia, the husband of the adopted granddaughter of George Washington, Lee was now a mere spectator to the tyranny of Reconstruction and all the graft and corruption in Washington City. It couldn’t have been easy.

In all, I’d say such pro-Lee scribes as Dr. Freeman and the Rev. J. William Jones read the man correctly. Rev. Jones might not have been an academic, but he was an intimate of Lee during the Lexington years. Duty and self-denial were the cornerstones of Lee’s life. He loved the former word, declaring it to be “the most sublimest word in the language. Always do your duty. Never do less.”

“Teach him he must deny himself,” the elderly Lee told the mother of a young child. Here again is the code Lee strived to live by: self-denial, the determination to live for others. That does lead to frustration. At Washington College, Lee posted only one rule: all students must behave as Christian gentlemen. Lee fell short, as do all who take up the cross. The effort, however, is important. In that sense, Lee is hardly a failure. His life remains a fascination to millions around the world. Two hundred years later, the controversies, the adulation, and the debates rage on. Every year, the books tumble out of the presses. General Lee lives.

General Lee and Copperhead New York

(This was delivered as an address at Pete’s Tavern in New York City on the occasion of Robert E. Lee’s bicentennial, January 19, 2007)

Today is a bittersweet day. It’s fine, of course, that 200 years later General Lee is still remembered. There are events commemorating this day going on elsewhere, including the annual parade in Atlanta. Events will be held throughout the year. You won’t see many politicians there. These days, the governor of Virginia is a fellow named Kaine, a native of Kansas, bleeding Kansas, that is. Whatever

Virginia does in honor of Lee, Kaine won't be there. Just think of how Lee has been perceived by the politicians over the years. Theodore Roosevelt, born right around the corner here on East Twentieth Street, hailed Lee as "the very greatest of all the great captains." And that's just for starters. In the 1950s, President Eisenhower made a ringing statement, declaring, in so many words, that a nation that had men with the character of Robert E. Lee could never fail, could never go wrong. Ike also lived to tell about it. The sky didn't tumble down on him.

Let's fast forward to the late 1970s. Jimmy Carter is in the White House. The South had "rejoined the Union," as the cliché of the day went. In the company of reporters, Carter made a joke: the version of *Gone With the Wind* that he saw as a youth in Georgia had, at its ending, General Lee's forces burning down Schenectady, New York, and winning the war. Everyone laughed. The South, after all, had rejoined the Union. Finally, shoot ahead to 2000, when President George W. Bush nominated John Ashcroft to be Attorney General. Ashcroft, a year earlier, had given a rather bland interview in *Southern Partisan* where he lamented the fact that schoolchildren today knew who Madonna was, but not Lee or Stonewall Jackson. This time, the sky did fall on the man's head. How terrible—politicians saying nice things about Lee and Jackson! And to think that the Left's great hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt, used to campaign in the South with Confederate flags flying. Ashcroft was forced to crawl, declaring that if he had been around in the 1860s, then this native of border state Missouri would have fought with Grant and Sherman. In fact, the last pol to sing Lee's praises was Senator Jesse Helms. Every January 19, without fail, ol' Jess would walk to the Senate floor to give a speech extolling Lee's virtues. His successor, Elizabeth Dole, does no such thing. Yes, the glare from a hostile media can burn bright.

As a member of the U.S. Army, Lee served in New York, off and on, from 1841 to 1846. He mostly did repair work on Fort Hamilton and Fort Lafayette, both located in Brooklyn. He served on the state's board of engineers and gave recommendations on improving the general defense of New York. Years before, Lee was a cadet at West Point. Lee was an ambitious youth who burned to redeem the family name. Two of his uncles signed the Declaration of Independence. His father, Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, was a Revolutionary War hero and a confidant of General Washington. It was he who eulogized Washington as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." After the war, the elder Lee made some poor real estate investments. He ran up large debts and was forced into exile in the West Indies as punishment. So attending West Point was a way for Lee to repair this great family's lost honor. At West Point, Lee graduated second in his class; he studied engineering and became fluent in French. In fact, he read Rousseau's *Confessions* in its original language. (My sister-in-law would like that.) Lee graduated from West Point without a single demerit—an astounding achievement in any age. Years later, Lee returned to West Point to serve as Superintendent of Cadets, where one of his students was the young Jeb Stuart.

At first, Lee's family, his wife and their five children, lived with him in Brooklyn. Eventually, they moved back to Arlington. Lee, in the meantime, threw himself into his work. He tackled his tasks with great vigor, but soon got frustrated. Lee was a soldier; he wanted action, chasing Indians in Texas maybe, but not the dull routine of repairing forts. Unlike Stonewall Jackson, Lee did not find New York especially intriguing. When he was stationed in New York, Jackson enjoyed the city's cultural amenities, visiting its museums and other attractions. Lee had a large family, and I believe he brooded over their welfare while living far from Virginia. From 1841 to 1846, Lee spent about two years in Arlington. Those were fruitful times, we might say. In 1843, a son, Robert Junior, was born. Three years later, his seventh and final child, Mildred, or "Precious Child," came into the world. That made it three boys and four girls, and the girls never married. During his time on the board of engineers, Lee commuted from Brooklyn to Manhattan, taking a ferry and traveling in a carriage during snowstorms. He has born much too early to experience the joys of crowded subways, buses, and commuter trains.

In all, Lee, during his time in New York, felt that life was passing him by. His career would not taste glory, but only see lowly obscurity. Fate soon intervened. In April 1846, a border skirmish ignited the Mexican War. At first, the 39-year-old Lee fretted that he would again be left behind. Indeed, for three months, he was consigned to a desk job at Governor's Island. Soon, the call came for war, and Lee served with such distinction in Mexico that General Winfield Scott pronounced him the finest soldier in the entire U.S. Army. Even greater drama lay ahead.

As far as I know, Lee never came back to New York. But New York did not forget him or the cause of the South, either. The War Between the States was unpopular in New York City. Fernando Wood, New York's mayor from 1860 to 1862, wanted to declare the city officially neutral in the hostilities. Governor Horatio Seymour, a states' rights Democrat, had his own disagreements with Mr. Lincoln. The idea of waging war against the southern people, men whose ancestors had traveled north during the Revolutionary War to aid the rebel cause, especially troubled the governor. Plus, there were Mr. Lincoln's dictatorial ways, such as arresting dissenting politicians and shutting down opposition newspapers. Above all, there was opposition to the draft. In March 1863, the Republican Party Congress passed a National Conscription Act. New Yorkers, jealous of their rights, resisted mightily. What happened in July 1863 was not just a mob riot by angry Irishmen. No, as our friend John Chodes has documented, there was a full-scale battle between New York militias loyal to the governor and Mr. Lincoln's federal forces. The draft was that hated. A battle raged all throughout downtown and midtown Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx, before the Feds, with reinforcements from Gettysburg, prevailed. Casualties were estimated in the tens of thousands.

After the war, thousands of southerners found refuge in New York. Varina Davis, Jeff Davis's widow, wrote a column for a New York paper. When Nathan

Bedford Forrest visited New York, he literally stopped traffic up and down Fifth Avenue. And the *New York Herald Tribune*, in 1868, actually endorsed General Lee as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee! Or, as the editorial stated:

[If] the Democratic Committee must nominate a soldier [to oppose Ulysses S. Grant] . . . Let it nominate General R. E. Lee . . . He is a better soldier than any of those they have thought upon and a better man. He is one in whom the military genius of this nation finds its fullest development. Here the inequality will be in favor of the Democrats for this soldier, with a handful of men whom he had moulded into an army, baffled our greater Northern armies for four years; and when opposed by Grant was only worn down by that solid strategy of stupidity that accomplishes its object by mere weight.

It didn't happen, but think about it. In three short years, Lee advanced from a hated "rebel" to a preferred presidential choice for the nation he served for 36 years, and then in defense of his homeland, fought fiercely against for four bloody ones. On a day like today, I guess we all feel like Hank Williams Jr.: "If the South had won, we'd a had it made." Who knows? There probably would be less government, less taxes, and even no public schools here in the Upper Sixteen, also.

1.3 Zebulon Vance: The Greatest Tar Heel

(2005)

Zebulon Vance, the popular governor of North Carolina during its most trying times, was not the first great political figure to come from the western mountains. There is Robert Swain, a native of Asheville, a governor of North Carolina and, for thirty productive years, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Another native, Joseph Lane, traveled to Oregon where he served as both governor of that state and as a U.S. congressman. He also was John Breckinridge's running mate in the ill-fated 1860 presidential race. The region produced Thomas Clingman, a U.S. senator who supported secession before the battle of Fort Sumter and a mountain climber for whom Clingman's Dome is named. Plus, there is Augustus Merrimon, also an Asheville native and the state's attorney general during the War Between the States. As a youth, I must have driven up and down Merrimon Avenue in North Asheville a thousand times without knowing (or caring) whom the thoroughfare was named for. Think about it. During the war, the governor of North Carolina (Vance), its attorney general (Merrimon), and the president of the state university (Swain) were all from little Asheville, which then had all of 1,000 people as its residents. Not only that, Merrimon and then Vance represented the state after the war in the U.S. Senate.

Zeb Vance was a man born to the breed. Both his paternal and maternal grandfathers were North Carolina state legislators. In addition, an uncle, Dr. Robert Brank Vance, briefly served as a U.S. congressman. Furthermore, a visit to Asheville by the legendary South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun also whetted the young Vance's interest in politics. Vance's mother, meanwhile, made sure her children were well read, introducing them to the classics of antiquity and of English literature, which was not out of the ordinary. That's often how things were in the old days. Teenagers, no matter what their formal education was, were well-versed in the Bible and often in Shakespeare and other English greats. Vance did have a formal education. He attended UNC, and like his fellow Ashevilleans Thomas Wolfe and Charlie Justice, Vance loved his stay at the arcadian Chapel Hill campus. After graduation, he practiced law in Asheville, married, started a family, and quickly got involved in local Democratic Party politics. At age twenty-eight, he was elected to the Buncombe County seat in Congress. The year was 1858, no normal time in American history. By the 1850s, it was clear that the Union was coming apart, a cultural fact long anticipated by such diverse individuals as John Quincy Adams, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As with the majority of his fellow Tar Heels, Vance wanted North Carolina to stay in the Union. As secession took place in the Cotton South, Vance remained a states' rights Unionist. In short, he supported the Union, but he could not tolerate any military invasion of the nascent Confederacy. A constitutional republic, yes; a war, no. Now came the moment of truth. The Deep South was out, but the Middle South, including Virginia, the region's most populous and prestigious state, was still in the Union. At the same time, no one in Buncombe County could join an army and march into South Carolina to kill men, many of whom they were related to by blood; most of whom they were kin to by an Anglo-Celtic heritage.

Here is where Mr. Lincoln blundered. With peace assured, the Deep South states, their protests over unfair tariffs made clear, might have rejoined the Union under more favorable revenue-collecting conditions. Such compromises had taken place in the near past. However, Lincoln didn't listen to those, such as Zeb Vance, who counseled prudent behavior. Instead, he sent the gunboats to Fort Sumter. He also ordered a naval blockade of North Carolina, even though it was still part of the United States. As in any tragedy, mistakes were made all around. Sending a flotilla to Fort Sumter was provocative. But firing on it, as the Carolinians did, was a blunder, also. A dramatic rendering of that fateful night shows Charleston women weeping at the sight of such bombardments. They knew what was next.

After Fort Sumter, a firefight that saw no casualties, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas all seceded, as did significant portions of the population in Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky. Zeb Vance was no summer soldier. He came home and immediately organized his own regiment, Company F, which

fought as part of North Carolina's legendary Twenty-sixth Infantry. Volunteers tumbled out of the mountains, not to defend slavery, but rather their land and families. On May 3, 1861, 151 young men followed Vance out of Asheville. Four years later, only one would come home alive.

Vance's brigade fought at Bethel and Richmond. In time, they would do battle at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. The man himself, meanwhile, ended up back in politics. In the summer of 1861, Governor Joseph Ellis died. After some prodding by friends, the young Vance ran for, and was elected, governor of North Carolina. Only 32, Vance was charged with enormous responsibilities: namely, how to keep this large state fed and clothed while it labored under a blockade of its coast, an occupation of New Bern and other eastern lands, and constant attacks from bushwhackers in the western mountains. From his people, Vance urged sacrifice and old-fashioned acts of Christian charity. It worked. Citizens looked out after each other. Women sewed socks for strangers. Farmers abandoned their money crops to produce bread and meat. Families began making their own clothes. Vance imposed a ban on whiskey stills, an act unpopular in Richmond. In those days, whiskey, as you might suspect, was used to treat wounded soldiers.

In 1864, Vance was easily re-elected. The young governor, who was now being compared to Patrick Henry, soon visited the troops in Virginia, where he rode alongside the great Robert E. Lee. Vance jokingly acknowledged that while Virginians made great leaders, North Carolinians were only too happy to be loyal followers of such men. After Appomattox, Federal authorities arrested Vance. He was even incarcerated for a time at a prison in Raleigh. Vance displayed no anxieties whatsoever over his arrest. He even joked about it. And why not? There wasn't a jury in North Carolina—even a reconstructed one—that would convict the beloved Zeb Vance of any "crime." President Andrew Johnson would eventually pardon Vance.

Still, Vance fell into a bout of depression following the war. He even considered moving to Australia. In time, however, he practiced law in Charlotte. He also planned to write a book about certain Tar Heel people and personalities. But the pull of politics proved too strong. In postwar North Carolina, Vance served, once again, as governor, and also as a U.S. senator, succeeding his friend Augustus Merrimon. In the Senate, Vance was considered a leader of the now-becalmed southern states delegation. As he did before the war, Vance counseled calm and reason. With Reconstruction over, tensions between the regions had subsided considerably.

On April 14, 1894, Zeb Vance died. A funeral train took the body from Washington to Asheville. Along the way, large crowds gathered in Danville, Virginia, plus Greensboro, Durham, and Raleigh, to pay their respects. In Asheville, the funeral was attended by 10,000 people, the largest such event in the city's history.

Vance was popular, but, of course, not perfect. During the war, he often clashed with Jefferson Davis over a variety of issues: the suspension of *habeas*

corpus, the whiskey ban, and whether a cargo of offshore bounty should be taken to Raleigh or Richmond. Most significant was the matter of needed supplies in the war's final months. Some critics, such as the historian Frank Owsley and the poet Allen Tate, have claimed that certain governors, especially Joe Brown of Georgia and Zeb Vance, withheld such material from the Army of Northern Virginia, preferring instead to keep equipment, weapons, food, and clothing in their home states. "The Confederacy starved," Tate observed in his 1929 biography of Jefferson Davis, "but not for a lack of food." Meanwhile, Glenn Tucker, Vance's own biographer, claimed that the problem was not selfishness but the lack of supply lines to Virginia during the final months. The debate will go on forever.

Vance, in my opinion, performed admirably under difficult circumstances. Had the South won, he might have served a term as the Confederacy's president. In all, Vance's popularity remains an amazing fact of North Carolina history. In these highly polarized times, we will likely never see such popularity again. Vance's appeal cut across all economic and social lines. It extended to large land-owners and hardscrabble farmers, to whites and blacks, Jew and Christian. Why? Well, I'd say that Vance was an old-fashioned "small r" republican, right in the classic Jeffersonian tradition. He believed in American liberties as they were once understood in this country: private property, self-government, free enterprise, and equality under the law. Not only would he say no to such monstrosities as an income tax, he would never tell folks where their children had to go to school (or if they even had to attend in the first place), or how a man could run his business and who he could hire. Intruding on one's home and property or honestly run business was unthinkable. In short, Vance the politician was willing to leave people alone, allowing them to pursue prosperity in their own way. Folks knew this and loved Vance for taking that stand.

In 1889, the large Vance monument was constructed in Asheville, a piece of sculpture that once dominated the town's skyline. In time, there would be monuments in Charlotte and Raleigh; the latter was built on the state capitol grounds. Then, in 1917, Vance received one of the greatest honors ever afforded a North Carolinian: a statue of him was placed in the famed Statuary Hall at the nation's capitol building in Washington. Recently, there has been a small revival of Vance's fortunes in his hometown: the local Zeb Vance camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans is back in action, plus a writing contest for high school students is named for Vance and Asheville's other world-renowned son, Thomas Wolfe.

Still, compare this to Vance's standing in the state during the years following war and Reconstruction. As Glenn Tucker relates, one could walk into a certain public school in North Carolina and be greeted by portraits of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson—and most prominent of all—Zebulon Vance. And why not? After all, this was Zeb Vance, then and now, the greatest Tar Heel.

Here is a North Carolina we have never known. But as the great historian, Douglas Southall Freeman always observed, it is never too late to seek a newer world.

1.4 The Other Side of Empire: Antiwar Southrons

(2003)

Immediately following the conquest of Baghdad, empire became all the rage in Washington. Both liberals and conservatives happily hopped aboard the imperial express with Rich Lowry, the youthful *National Review* editor, soon proclaiming that we are “all colonists now.” The American public, on the other hand, can be touchy about the entire subject. No, America isn’t about empire; instead, it stands for some vague “freedom” for all the world’s peoples. Either way, in both dollars and blood, the taxpayer subsidizes his government’s endless military adventures.

Antiwar dissent has never been popular in American history. But it has existed. Right from the beginning, opposition to empire—and all the wars such an operation entails—has been part of the American discourse. Consider only George Washington’s warnings against “entangling alliances” in his famous farewell address, a sentiment strongly seconded by Thomas Jefferson during the latter’s first inaugural speech.

Washington and Jefferson were, of course, Virginians, but they were hardly the only two anti-interventionists from that state, or, for that matter, from the entire region. The War of 1812 had at least one well-known southern opponent. Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee was a Revolutionary War hero, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a personal friend of Washington, and father of the Confederacy’s own greatest war hero. For his troubles, the elder Lee got his eyes blackened by a mob on a Baltimore street.

Next up was John C. Calhoun, who opposed the Mexican War, fearing, correctly as it turned out, that the war and the subsequent new territories it gained for the U.S. would upset the delicate population balance that existed between the North and South. And that was just the beginning. Southerners are always accused of “still fighting the war.” But compare that to how Mexicans feel. The map of Mexico that is shown to schoolchildren south of the border is not the one we see. Rather, it includes California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada. The U.S. government fuels all this with its stubborn open border policy.

Jefferson Davis is the most famous southern peacenik. Davis, needless to say, did not want war with Mr. Lincoln’s government. His famous plea, “All we ask for is to be left alone,” sounds, in the face of American history, naïve, but it was noble nonetheless, and for it, Davis remains a monumental figure in nineteenth-century history. All during the war, the Davis administration sent peace feelers towards Washington, only to be rejected at every turn. Once the war ended, Davis was stuck with a cruel incarceration in a Federal prison. As a consolation

prize, he received a crown of thorns from Pope Pius IX. Some things never change. In 2003, the Vatican opposed similar Yankee aggression in Iraq.

On to Cuba

With power now consolidated in Washington, the empire soon went overseas. A yellow press and a warmongering cabinet forced a reluctant President McKinley into an ill-fated war with a dying Spanish empire. Senator Tom Watson, the agrarian populist from Georgia, and Mark Twain, veteran of the Army of Tennessee, were only two of that conflict's many critics. A century after the war, Congress still debates whether to give statehood to Puerto Rico, a mostly poor, Spanish-speaking island of four million inhabitants. That's only one of the many harsh prizes an empire extracts.

The Spanish-American War was a typical imperial adventure, a conflict over land and treasure. Woodrow Wilson's war was more revolutionary. In 1916, Wilson promised to keep America out of the terrible bloodletting taking place in Europe. He lied. In fact, Wilson wanted war because, according to Hans-Herman Hoppe, he hated the monarchies of Austria, Germany, and Russia, and wanted them overthrown. Well, it happened, and what did we get in return? Such monsters as Lenin, Hitler, and Stalin. A lonely voice in opposition belonged to Claude Kitchin of North Carolina, then serving as House Majority Leader. Kitchin observed that America's new "enemies" in Germany and Austria did not threaten America, nor did they have any designs on American territory. The "war to end all wars" only sowed the seeds for an even more catastrophic conflict, but it also was America's first truly ideological war.

Franklin Roosevelt, too, lied America into war. On the hustings in 1940, he promised to keep the country only out of a "European war" while all the time scheming, mostly through economic sanctions, to get Japan into a war with the U.S. There wasn't much southern opposition to the Good War. The only Southern Democrat to consistently oppose Roosevelt's war plans was Robert Reynolds, the eccentric junior senator from North Carolina. Because the popular America First movement had little following in the South, Reynolds did not join, but he was correct when he stated that Joe Stalin would be the war's big winner. As if to prove Reynolds right, Roosevelt and Winston Churchill appeased Stalin on the Eastern Europe question, first at Teheran in 1943, and then more spectacularly at Yalta a year later.

Appeasement gave us a 40-year Cold War, yet another twilight struggle, one that turned hot in both Korea and Vietnam. The Vietnam War brought forth one of the South's most eloquent opponents of empire, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas. It was Fulbright who coined the phrase "arrogance of empire" and who noted that "the price of empire is America's soul and that price is too high." In fact, the reflective Fulbright claimed his anti-imperialism was due in part to his

Confederate ancestry and to the decades of grinding poverty his fellow Arkansas residents endured, courtesy of an earlier war and ruthless Reconstruction.

The Empire Today

The end of the Cold War did not herald an age of normalcy. Remember the “peace dividend,” our reward for subsidizing the Cold War? It never materialized. The U.S. government was now off to fight wars with such powerhouses as Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. But right from the first war against Iraq in 1991, the opposition from southern scholars and politicians has been more impressive than ever. Many critics of empire, especially Tom Fleming, Clyde Wilson, and Sam Francis, were friends of the late M. E. Bradford, himself the most influential Lincoln critic of our time. And so, a line from the War Between the States to current aggression was drawn. Pat Buchanan, a descendent of Confederate veterans, penned a memorable history against American empire, while on the political side, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) courageously opposed wars that had the strong support of their fellow southerners. During the failed occupation of Somalia, Byrd introduced legislation that called for the defunding of the whole miserable “nation building” effort. *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, meanwhile, jumped to Bill Clinton’s defense, moaning that such legislation would “make hash” of the Clinton presidency. Not such a bad idea, but then again, neoconservatives love empire and they don’t mind at all if a liberal Democrat is the one dropping the bombs.

The views of all the above gentlemen have, to reiterate a point, been in the minority. Historians have noted a split in southern views on foreign policy. There is the old Washington–Jefferson aristocratic school of isolationism, of minding one’s business, of leaving a fallen world alone. On the other side is the more belligerent position, one exemplified by Andrew Jackson and James Polk. The latter view has won out, but worth considering also are the thoughts of another Virginia aristocrat: “The consolidation of the states into one vast empire, sure to be aggressive abroad, and despotic at home, will be the certain precursor of ruin which has overwhelmed all that preceded it.”

So spoke Robert E. Lee after the devastation of the Civil War. But let’s just look at the past fifty years. In return for empire, Americans have received nothing except crushing taxation, a mammoth growth in the size and power of a centralized regime, a judicial tyranny, open immigration borders, a corporate media which allows for little dissent, and a fanatical attempt to wipe out every vestige of the nation’s regional cultures, especially the one south of Mason and Dixon’s line. Our schools are under federal control, our children’s textbooks are written by eggheads who hate the South; in addition, those same feds take potshots at the Confederate flag at every chance they get. Several years ago, a cookie-cutter bureaucrat from the Department of Education complained about a

high school in west Georgia that had the flag painted on its gymnasium floor—as if that was any of her business. As significantly, the conquerors themselves are being conquered. The latter phenomenon is a centuries-old trademark of empire. Ancient Rome disappeared, in part, under a tidal wave of immigration. The same is occurring today in not just the U.S., but also Great Britain, France, and such small-fry nations as the Netherlands and Belgium.

What resistance there is to American imperialism comes mostly from overseas. No one likes mighty America bombing innocents just for cheaper gas prices at the pump. There is also the matter of American “culture.” The face of America has changed drastically over the past half century. Even by the early 1960s, the poet Robert Frost and such novelists as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner could define American civilization. Now, it’s MTV and abortion-on-demand, not to mention an anti-Western multiculturalism. Empires tend toward centralization in government and decadence in culture. Both result in spoiled, childish masses. Ancient Athens and Rome also died through skimpy fertility rates. Now both the U.S. and the U.K. are recording some of the lowest birth rates in their respective histories. Clearly, global resentment is not our most pressing problem. As time goes on, the question becomes more urgent: how can the American nation hope to survive an American empire?

I.5 Southrons First: Dixie Democrats Revisited

(2004)

I first became familiar with that long-vanquished group of politicians known as the Southern Democrats through the writings of the incomparable M. E. Bradford. As someone who grew up in western North Carolina at a time when the South was changing from a Democratic stronghold to a Republican “Sunbelt,” the Dixie Democrat was a breed I was only scantily aware of. From Bradford’s scholarship, I learned that there was much more to them than just the popular stereotype of the race-baiting demagogue, (which, any case, wasn’t true). SDs, mostly, were serious statesmen who, with much candor, confronted all the great issues of their time.

The Southern Democrat is no more. Consider only the banalities uttered by John Edwards in his recent presidential campaign. As such, an assessment of the SDs’ time on the center stage of American politics is possible. The old Southern Democrats had their roots in the decentralizing tradition of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, John Randolph of Roanoke, and John C. Calhoun. Reading about such men never gets tiring. They all desperately wanted to keep government functions to the barest minimum and, when they existed, close to home. Jefferson, for instance, endorsed ratification of the Constitution only because he felt the Tenth Amendment would serve as a faithful check on the will to power. Henry, on the other hand, opposed ratification, preferring to stick with the even less centralizing Articles of Confederation. For his part, Randolph thought that

both Jefferson and the older Patrick Henry were too enamored of a central regime. Think about it. Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, big-government men.

After the War Between the States and Reconstruction, the southern people, more than ever, attached themselves to the Democratic Party, for that old states' rights, pro-Agrarian party represented nothing less than a virtual lifeline to the supine southern people. It wasn't a religion, the party of Jefferson and Jackson, but maybe the next thing to it. Southerners were about the only Americans to stay loyal to the Democratic Party during the Republican era of 1865 to 1932. Consequently, leading Democrats of that age, especially Grover Cleveland and William Jennings Bryan, were conservative in a way that would make Ronald Reagan blush.

When Franklin Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, southerners were rewarded for their patience. FDR's vice president was John Nance Garner of Texas. The Speaker of the House was Thomas Underwood of Alabama; the House Majority Leader, Sam Rayburn of Texas; and Alben Barkley of Kentucky served as Senate Majority Leader. After years of wandering in the political wilderness, southerners now held some real power in the still-modest capital city. As with most Americans, southern pols supported the New Deal. By the end of the decade, however, things turned interesting.

First, there was FDR's manic desire to pack the Supreme Court by adding two more seats to that once-august body. Why? Well, the court, in the mid-1930s, had struck down much New Deal legislation as unconstitutional. FDR wanted to make room for his boys to serve on that body. Then there was FDR's deficit spending. Consider that from 1933 to 1939, the nation's total budget deficit ballooned from \$22 billion to \$72 billion, the largest such peacetime increase in American history. Southern Democrats were staunch Jeffersonians. They abhorred such debts being saddled upon generations yet born. Leader of the revolt was the irascible Garner, "Cactus Jack," a man who at the time was considered the greatest Texan since Sam Houston. As vice president, Garner was no wallflower. He helped to deliver a crushing defeat to FDR's court-packing power grab. Furthermore, with the help of his fellow SDs, plus some conservative Republicans from the Midwest and Western states, all new spending programs were routinely shot down. During most afternoons in the 1938–1939 political season, conservative lawmakers gathered in Cactus Jack's office, where they sipped whiskey and plotted to keep the socialistic New Deal under wraps. It represented the last time there was a conservative governing majority in Washington.

To stay on top, Garner would have to challenge Roosevelt in the 1940 presidential primaries. There, Garner met his final defeat. With Europe at war, primary voters opted to stick with an experienced president. And true enough, war for America did come, even though Roosevelt, while on the stump in 1940, promised to keep the nation out of the European theatre. (He said nothing about the Pacific region, where in fact the war started for the U.S.)

Southern Democrats, almost to a man, also supported Roosevelt's war efforts. The young Lyndon Johnson even quit his job as congressman for Texas's Tenth

District in order to fight in the Pacific theatre. No draft was needed for Dixie. Southern boys willingly volunteered to serve. But proponents of the war didn't see what was coming. They viewed the conflict in patriotic terms, that is, "fighting for your country," while never realizing that the war, as Sam Francis recalled many years later, was also a "social and political revolution," one made by the hard Left. The old isolationist America was defeated and replaced by a powerful and arrogant federal government that would meddle incessantly in everyone's affairs. Such targets were not just foreign countries on the other end of the globe, but also the hapless forty-eight states now under Uncle Sam's control.

The SDs' postwar resistance to the coming rule of school busing, plus federal civil and voting rights laws, has forever discredited them in a world where history is written by the Left and their fellow travelers on the respectable Right. In 1956, the SDs answered the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision with a reply simply known as "Declaration of Constitutional Principles." Although northern liberals immediately savaged it, the manifesto, authored mostly by Strom Thurmond and Richard Russell, was intended to be a serious, scholarly document and so it behooves us to read it that way. The short paper (only a little more than two and a half pages) has its strong points. The authors noted that "the original Constitution does not mention education. Neither does the 14th amendment or any other amendment."

What does that mean? Well, as all admirers of the long-lost Tenth Amendment immediately understand, education is the business only of the states. There also was the moral and practical argument. As the manifesto maintains:

This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court . . . is creating chaos and confusion in the States principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding. Without regard to the consent of the governed, outside agitators are threatening immediate and revolutionary changes in our public school systems. If done, this is certain to destroy the system of public education in some of the States.

Only "some of the States?" Yes, the SDs had their points. Unelected judges telling parents where their children must attend school *is* tyranny. And busing orders *did* turn urban America into a wasteland. Once such orders were issued, the middle class, by the millions, abandoned the public schools and with them, the safe and decent neighborhoods their ancestors had settled and maintained. Here, the judges and politicians got what they wanted: a reactionary people out of their way, banished to the sterility of suburbia. Countless cities, now robbed of their main tax base, collapsed into a free fall. Put another way, when was the last time the United States had a president who sent his children to public schools

in Washington, D.C.? For things to get better, cities may have to de-populate entirely—and then become reborn. That will take decades, many decades.

Still, the document did have some weaknesses, at a time when there was no margin for error. To preempt the liberals, the authors should have called for a simple equality under the law. The document also notes that a *de jure* segregation concerning education was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in the nineteenth century and first practiced in numerous Northern states before being transferred to the South following the war. They also displayed some naïveté by proclaiming their “full faith” that most Americans “will in time demand that the reserved rights of the States and of the people be made secure against judicial usurpation.”

In truth, Northern lawmakers, by the 1950s, weren’t interested in hearing of their region’s own segregation, legal or *de facto*. They only wanted to reconstruct (again) the South. Secondly, even though Americans by large majorities had no use for social engineering, there was nothing they could do to stop it. The Supreme Court was determined to “substitute naked power for established law” and no Tenth Amendment was going to stand in their way. Neither was an equally revolutionary U.S. Congress.

Twentieth-century Southern Democrats were about more than one issue. In the mid-1960s, Thurmond and Sam Ervin were among the few voices to oppose the ill-conceived 1965 immigration reform law, a piece of legislation that by opening America’s doors to the Third World is destined to be remembered as the one single act that permanently finished off the old, Eurocentric America.

Both Thurmond and Ervin essentially defended America’s founding Anglo-Saxon-Celtic culture as the source of what liberties the American people still enjoyed. Why destroy what was left of that culture by admitting millions of immigrants from alien (and likely hostile) ones? As Bradford himself pointed out in a 1984 essay, the Founding Fathers would, at best, have accepted only limited European immigration. Later generations would generally prohibit migrations from Asia and Africa. In all, immigration laws, the Founders believed, should concern “the ‘tranquility and safety’ of the United States,” and not abstract notions that the young country must be a refuge for all the world’s peoples. By the 1960s, only Southern Democrats, in real numbers, still subscribed to such common-sense ideas.

Even into the 1970s, remnants of the old guard displayed some fight in them. That decade saw, among many other things, the rise and defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Its leading opponent in the Senate was the irrepressible Ervin, possibly the most intelligent of all the more famous SDs. While Phyllis Schlafly worried that the ERA would mean women in the foxholes (which happened anyway), Ervin saw more ominous consequences: “equal rights” in this case, would promote homosexuality. Women, Ervin reasoned, can already get married. What’s next? Recent Supreme Court decisions have already illustrated how prescient Ervin was.

On the national level, the 1970s also witnessed George Wallace's final presidential campaign, which itself represented the last stand of the old states' rights tradition. Pointing to increased attention to law and order (and not "root causes"), plus welfare reform, Wallace has long been hailed by critics as the most influential loser in American politics. True, but there are now so many other nation-breaking issues that were not central in Wallace's day. If only Pat Buchanan and *his* issues—immigration, foreign policy, trade, and the culture wars—had achieved such influential loser status, then the old America might yet live to see another day.

The 1994 congressional rout of the Democratic Party completed the decades-long transformation of a Democratic South to a mostly Republican entity. And indeed, there are no heirs to the Dixie Democrat tradition, save the eighty-six-year-old Robert Byrd, the senior senator from West Virginia. Savor the performance while you can. Byrd has been a member of the Senate since 1957, but he has really come into his own late in the game. Since the end of the Cold War, Byrd has been the Senate's most learned and eloquent voice in opposition to American imperialism. He is certainly the only senator with any deep knowledge of Western history and its lessons of man's limitations. Plus, he is right on the immigration issue. At the same time he was playing a small part as a Confederate officer in Ron Maxwell's instant classic film, *Gods and Generals*, Byrd stood tall against the latest exercise in Yankee aggression, George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq. There was nothing surprising about either role.

Not all prominent Southern Democrats can be placed in the same box. Some, like Richard Russell, were staunch conservatives whose states' rights stand was routed by the Democratic Party's dominant liberal wing. A few, like Estes Kefauver and Lyndon Johnson, were rank opportunists, siding with the liberals in order to win their party's presidential nomination. A large number, especially Sam Rayburn, were moderate; they supported New Deal/Fair Deal spending programs, but opposed federal intrusions into areas such as education.

Of all the great SDs who served in Washington, Russell and Rayburn both cast the largest shadows. Today, the main office buildings for Senate and House members are named, respectively, for each man. Russell was a symbol of resistance and defeat, while Rayburn, a most loyal Democrat, tried valiantly to hold the middle ground. That stand, too, seemed destined to fail. After World War II, powerful Democrats were determined to move the party further left, to cater to the urban centers in the Northeast and Midwest.

Rayburn died in 1961. With his passing, the last check on Democratic Party radicalism disappeared. Rayburn was the son of a Confederate veteran, a man who rode with both Nathan Bedford Forrest and Robert E. Lee, a man who also was with Lee at Appomattox. In honor of his father, Rayburn always kept a portrait of Lee, plus several Confederate flags, in his speaker's office. In the 1950s, none of this was considered controversial. Had Rayburn lived, the 1960s

might not have turned into the apocalypse. After all, he was the one man the always-vain Lyndon Johnson respected. Would Rayburn's influence have served to apply the brakes on escalation in Vietnam, immigration overload, and even social disorder? I say yes, but of course, we'll never know.

Also after World War II, sympathetic observers counseled the SDs to give up on the New Deal altogether and adopt a strict libertarian stand on governmental matters. It was sound advice not heeded. And so, in light of the tyranny that marches on, I'd choose John Nance Garner as the greatest twentieth-century Southern Democrat. By the late 1930s, he knew what a revolutionary movement the New Deal had become.

The Southern Democrat is no more. The Southern Republican (SR) never was. It's true that on numerous issues—immigration, abortion, affirmative action, definition of marriage—SRs reflect their constituents' conservatism. In all, SRs are party men; their allegiance is to the Republican Party, which still means serving the rulers of the global economy. The Southern Democrat was different. Whenever push came to shove, they were southerners first. Fidelity to the U.S. Constitution was their primary concern. The integrity of a distinct southern culture was central also to their thought and actions. Here is a group of statesmen with much to tell us about prudent governance.

1.6 Agrarian Valhalla: The Vanderbilt Twelve and Beyond

(1999)

Whenever the subject is Nashville, Tennessee, most people immediately think of country music. As do I. When our family vacationed there, we'd stay at a Hampton Inn close to Vanderbilt University. During one vacation, we didn't have anywhere in particular to go. Eventually, I thought, "Vanderbilt is next door. The Richard Weaver papers are there at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library." (I had been polishing up a book on Weaver at the time). "Why don't you get up and go?"

So we went, parking next to a fast food joint. It was August and few students were on campus. The Jean and Alexander Heard Library is an Agrarian Valhalla. One is greeted by a handsome portrait of Allen Tate, busts of Andrew Lytle and Donald Davidson, copies of recent books on the Agrarians, plus the famous 1956 reunion photograph of the Fugitive poets and their fellow travelers taken when the Vanderbilt administration welcomed distinguished alumni back on campus for a three-day symposium sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. After all, it was the Fugitive-Agrarians who had made Vanderbilt famous the world over.

Then there are the books and manuscripts. The Fugitives started publishing their own verse in the 1920s, and original editions of publications by all the major figures, including the novelist Caroline Gordon, are listed in chronological order. The papers of, among others, Davidson, Tate, Warren, and Weaver are on

file. Among the bound manuscripts are Warren's *All the King's Men* and Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, southern fiction and scholarship at its very best. I glanced through the letter collections of Tate and Davidson and Weaver. One could, of course, spend years and years in this modest study.

A Bright Day in the Life of the Imagination

Why the Agrarians? What started in Nashville in the 1920s, at the home of a local patron of the arts, a Saturday-night poetry reading and criticism session attended by Ransom and select students, flowered into one of the most significant American literary and intellectual movements of the twentieth century. It reverberates with us still. A thousand flowers, to borrow a phrase from the Chinese, did bloom forth and into various unique and creative directions at that. The Fugitives, inspired by such worthies as T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, and Thomas Hardy, single-handedly took southern literature out of a moldering romantic age and into a more hard-edged realistic, modernist era. Then came the Scopes "Monkey Trial" and the global condemnation of the South's "backward" fundamentalism. That prompted the Fugitives to take a more social and political stand. *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), the famous volume that followed, dabbled in politics, but mostly it was an evocative defense of the Jeffersonian vision, as was its 1936 successor, *Who Owns America?*, a volume that branched out to include the famed British Christian apologist Hilaire Belloc. The books, especially *Stand*, worked, due in part to the lyrical celebration of an agrarian order, especially in Andrew Lytle's "The Hind Tit," and the withering attack on an impersonal industrialism. Or, as Donald Davidson pointed out in "A Mirror for Artists," the old America produced poets, novelists, songwriters, and artisans of all sorts, while Henry Ford's factory hands read movie confession magazines and tabloid newspapers while listening to jazz music. There was no creativity in an industrial order, just mass consumption.

To me, the title of the 1930 manifesto played no small part in its success. Sure, folks would attack a book with a title including lyrics from "Dixie." But those same people would also denounce it under a different title, since its contents, which were antistatist to the core, cut sharply against the intellectual grain, then dominated by hard Marxists and soft socialists. The title worked precisely *because* it was provocative, defiant, bold—and sectional, as they used to say.

Meanwhile, there was more poetry, more volumes from Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren. And then fiction, from Lytle, Gordon, and Warren, the man who has long been the most famous of the Agrarians, based on his 1946 best seller, *All the King's Men*. On the fiction side, I would also give a nod to Caroline Gordon, who, in books ranging from the settling of Kentucky (*Penhally*) to the War Between the States (*None Shall Look Back*) to such Christian comedies as *Women on the Porch*, is one of the great historical novelists in American literature.

That wasn't all. The Fugitive-Agrarians excelled in non-fiction as well—and in many varied forms. Consider biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson

Davis by Allen Tate, of John Brown by Warren (published when he was only twenty-nine), and, finally, Lytle's biography of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a book first published in 1931, one still in print (and popular) today, a biography considered by such eminent critics as Tom Landess to be the finest single-volume book on the War Between the States.

By the early 1930s, the Agrarians, at least through their individual careers, were just getting started. The bull sessions on Whitfield Avenue were, more than anything, about a rigorous criticism of a member's work. And so, the early numbers of *The Fugitive* contained literary criticism in addition to creative efforts. This evolved into the New Criticism, a genre that ruled the roost on college campuses from the 1940s to the '60s, when the barbarians crashed the gates. The New Critics, also inspired by Eliot and the English critic I. A. Richards, placed all emphasis on the text. There was no hidden political agenda in a poem, no Marxist interpretation, which, in time, disintegrated into deconstructionism, multiculturalism, political correctness, "queer theory," and the like. The New Criticism reigned when English departments cared more about the merits of a text than the author's political stand. Ransom and Warren, for instance, were political liberals who also happened to be literary traditionalists. Davidson, likewise, was a staunch conservative who did not let politics interfere with the teaching of literature.

A new criticism taught by Ransom, Brooks, and Warren and their disciples soon became the basis of several fine textbooks, especially *Understanding Poetry* by Brooks and Warren. Even a 1980s college graduate like myself was taught with the latter text. The Brooks and Warren collaboration included similar texts in fiction and drama, plus a magisterial overview of American literature. Donald Davidson himself authored another impressive textbook, *American Reading and Composition*. I'll bet anyone a million bucks that the latter is superior to anything floating around college classrooms today.

All along, too, were publications edited by the Vanderbilt alumni. As noted, the Fugitives published their own quarterly. That was just the beginning. From the unsuspecting flatlands of Baton Rouge came *The Southern Review*, edited by Brooks and Warren. By 1940, *Time* magazine would declare it to be the finest literary quarterly in the English-speaking world. In time, the Louisiana State University administration cut off funding for that journal (keeping the football team's real-life tiger mascot instead). In the meantime, Ransom had left Vanderbilt for Kenyon College, where he became editor of *The Kenyon Review*. By the mid-1950s, Gambier, Ohio (where Kenyon was located), and not New York City, was considered the "literary capital of the United States." Everyone wanted to be published in *The Kenyon Review*. In the mid-1940s, Allen Tate took over as editor of *Sewanee Review*. With his vast network of writer friends on both sides of the Atlantic, Tate quickly propelled *Sewanee* to its own literary preeminence. Later, Andrew Lytle served as editor of that august journal. In between all this, fellow Agrarian John Donald Wade founded *The Georgia Review*, yet another journal

equal in stature to the above publications. All three continue to maintain high standards, as they struggle to keep literature alive in an electronic world.

A word, too, should be said about history volumes. All the unreconstructed Agrarians (Owsley, Davidson, and Lytle) wrote history. Owsley was a professional historian; the brief but thorough *Plain Folk of the Old South* remains his most important work, a volume that shatters long-held stereotypes about southerners, showing them to be a highly literate and prosperous people. Davidson contributed a two-volume history of the Tennessee River, while Lytle's family history, *A Wake for the Living*, has been properly recognized by such eminent critics as J. A. Bryant as a significant American classic.

The Coming of Disciples

Starting with Cleanth Brooks, the decades following *Stand* saw the coming of the disciples. Brooks wrote literary and some social criticism, but with Richard Weaver and M. E. Bradford, this genre took a more historical and political bent. Weaver's greatest work was *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, a spirited, moving work on how defeated southerners confronted the new world they were now thrust into. All had changed, but at least some of them were determined to hold on to the old verities. Weaver's 1948 classic, *Ideas Have Consequences*, was a founding text for the post-World War II conservative movement. *Ideas* was both an assault on an urban modernity and a defense of the mostly rural non-materialistic world he first celebrated in *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.

Bradford is the South's great scholar on the dramas of the early America, namely the ratification debate and the War Between the States. Although Bradford never wrote that the anti-Federalists were right and the Constitution should have never been ratified, his placing of the anti-Federalist Patrick Henry as the great hero of the Founding Era clearly points in that direction. Meanwhile, there was no ambiguity on Bradford's part on the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. Bradford is, in fact, the founder of modern-day Lincoln criticism. The Lincoln revisionism we see today, especially best-selling books by Charles Adams and Thomas DiLorenzo, continues in the new tradition: Lincoln's war against the South leveled both the Old Republic and the splendid isolationism of Washington and Jefferson, hurtling the nation into the highly resented global empire it is today.

By the mid-1980s, the conservative movement that Richard Weaver had helped to found was floundering, ruined by East Coast urbanites who had thrown in the towel and accepted the liberalism of the 1950s and '60s as a "good" thing. No matter. The "new" Old Right's driving forces—Thomas Fleming, Clyde Wilson, and Samuel Francis—were all friends of Bradford. All three contributed to *Why the South Will Survive* (1980), the fiftieth-anniversary sequel to *I'll Take My Stand*. Under the leadership of Tom Fleming, a writer and editor who is the equal of the more famous gentlemen discussed in this essay,

the Old Right went beyond American history for inspiration: they exalted the classics of Athens and Rome, the Christendom of the Middle Ages, and all the great critics of the post-Christian West, from Charles Peguy to G.K. Chesterton. From the Bradford influence, there is sympathy for the anti-Federalists and modern Lincoln criticism. On the issues front, the Old Right, with its opposition to Third World immigration and American imperialism, has roiled the waters like never before. The Old Right remains a provocative intellectual movement with, unfortunately, no political victories, a sad fate it shares with the Vanderbilt Twelve. Indeed, Davidson's great hope, that "this nation may endure" through a healthy federalism and vibrant regional cultures, seems a more melancholy and distant dream than ever.

Beyond politics, there is the achievement of Wendell Berry. Again, we have the whole package: fiction, poetry, short stories, essays, classroom teaching. Berry celebrates the land and family, but he also points out its hardships (no one's going to make much money at this venture) and its uncertain future (countless family farms have been lost, but a resistance remains). As with Andrew Lytle, Berry, to cite Flannery O'Connor, just doesn't say no, he *does* no. That is, no television or computers in the household. Foodstuffs should be locally grown and purchased. His grandchildren walk the same land that Berry himself trod upon with *his* grandparents. The Agrarians were highly creative artists, but in Wendell Berry, we have the novelist/short story writer/poet/essayist that they were looking for, and, of course, whom they themselves strove to become.

Poetry, fiction, history and social criticism, biography, history, politics, the publication of textbooks and literary quarterlies, plus a riveting journal of opinion (Tom Fleming's *Chronicles*). Obviously, this essay is the effort of an unabashed admirer. And why not? A spark that was lit in the early 1920s still lights those bleak afternoons. If the New York literati ever recognized the Agrarians, it was because Ransom and Warren were liberals, but also due to the fact that during the 1920 and '30s, there were conservative elements in the Manhattan publishing world. Volumes about the Agrarians still tumble out of the university presses. The Agrarians and their intellectual offspring are representatives of a lost world, but since their worldview represents such an appealing alternative to the chaos and torpor of our times, they have managed to stick around. To quote John Crowe Ransom in the introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, the great concern was not the accumulation of material things but a world where the "amenities of life" such as "manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life and romantic love" would flourish. In the classical Christian tradition, the Agrarians also considered the worth of the individual: man is a craftsman, work is a vocation, all should feel they are doing something indispensable for a society's well-being. The entire Agrarian achievement amounts to a brilliant vision of old-fashioned liberties. As important, a number of these writers also practiced such freedoms in their everyday lives. In all, it points to a better world, one that is still there for the taking.

I.7 Donald Davidson

The Patron Saint of Southern Traditionalists

Where No Flag Flies: Donald Davidson and the Southern Resistance. Mark Royden Winchell. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

(2000)

“It may be argued that no one person has had a greater part in the development of a profession of letters in the twentieth century South than has Donald Davidson.” So claimed Davidson’s own friend and student M. E. Bradford in an essay written three decades ago. A bold statement indeed, especially when one considers that a great literature, in that same century, was the South’s most important contribution to the cause of Western civilization. Over the years, Davidson’s work has received much critical scrutiny. At long last, he is now the subject of a full-length biography. *Where No Flag Flies* comes on the heels of Mark Royden Winchell’s award-winning biography of Cleanth Brooks. This one is a little better, if only because Davidson’s career was more interesting, his unreconstructed stand a towering model of courage. The book is not hagiography; Davidson’s many strong points, as well as his nagging shortcomings, are presented and analyzed. With access to his subject’s extensive journal, Professor Winchell’s volume adds some much-needed drama and significance to the Davidson story. It will be a handsome addition to any southern patriot’s library.

Donald Davidson’s rise to literary fame is inspiring enough. A poor boy from Middle Tennessee, the son of a schoolteacher at various academies throughout that region, Davidson worked his way through Vanderbilt University, eventually securing a teaching job there himself, where he then met fellow poets John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. These gentlemen found inspiration from the poetry of such modernists as T.S. Eliot. It was, however, through their efforts, which included a rigorous criticism of one another’s works, that these writers, soon to be known as the Fugitive poets, took a bland southern literature out of the doldrums and into an exciting era of creativity, the impact of which is still with us today.

Davidson had much in common with modernism, but he also embraced the bardic tradition when writing his own poetry. The achievement of Thomas Hardy, for instance, was always important to him. “The Tall Men,” a collection of poems about the settling of the Tennessee frontier, was not simply the cry of an alienated poet but rather about the perils of creating and maintaining an authentic folk culture. His 1938 classic, “Lee in the Mountains,” implores the “generations of the faithful heart” to keep the legacy of Robert E. Lee and the Confederacy alive into the uncertain future awaiting the post-war South. Davidson knew the times were decadent, but his poetry did more than highlight that condition; it also sought to recover a usable, more heroic past for southerners to rally around.

An important poet, Davidson excelled in other creative endeavors. He wrote the lyrics for *Singin’ Billy*, a delightful libretto about a preacher who attempts to

introduce southern harmony spirituals to mountain people in the South Carolina highlands. His only novel, *The Big Ballad Jamboree*, is a charming comedy about a country music singer and his girlfriend, a graduate school student who scours the hills of western North Carolina, collecting folk ballads for her master's thesis. Davidson lived his entire adult life in Nashville, and he often enjoyed being entertained at the Ryman Auditorium. In the novel, he placed his hero at the Grand Ole Opry, having him declare that this venue represented a good enough marriage of traditional music and the emerging commercial world. Davidson wrote *The Big Ballad Jamboree* in the late 1940s. Miraculously enough, his granddaughter discovered the manuscript sometime in the early 1990s and found, if not the large publishing house it deserved, then at least a home for it at the University of Mississippi Press.

Hence Davidson's problem. These days, more than ever, politics and literature are joined at the hip. This alone explains the intense dislike for Davidson, not only among the Manhattan literati, but also among academics in his beloved homeland. Hal Crowther, for one, notes that Davidson's name is still a cuss word at English departments throughout the South. Along with Andrew Lytle and Frank Owsley, Davidson was the most unreconstructed of the Vanderbilt Agrarians. In fact, with Ransom and Tate, he shepherded the Fugitives' transition to Agrarianism, the result being the famous 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*. One of the lasting books of the twentieth century, *Stand* was much more than a brief against large-scale industrialism. More importantly, it was a stirring call for Americans to reclaim their republican heritage, a way of life where, as Ransom pointed out, the "amenities of life . . . such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love . . . religion and the arts" are not compromised by a strictly business, highly regimented urban order.

Politically, the Agrarian movement went nowhere, but Davidson never gave up the fight. Traditionalists have long revered a 1938 essay collection, *The Attack on Leviathan*. Out in Michigan, for instance, that volume had a huge impact on the young Russell Kirk. Here, Davidson delivered a spirited defense of the nation's varied—and creative—regional cultures, citing William Faulkner and Robert Frost as products of such environments. He memorably praised the "old folks at home" as representing the last line of defense against a purely materialistic society.

Such moderns prefer to grasp the familiar. They want something to engage both their reason and their love. . . . The future is not yet. . . . But the past was, the present is; of that they can be sure. So they attach themselves . . . to a home-section, one of the sections . . . defined in the long conquest of our continental area. They seek spiritual and cultural autonomy. . . . They are learning how to meet the subtlest and most dangerous foe of humanity—the tyranny that wears the mask of humanitarianism and benevolence. They are attacking Leviathan.

With Donald Davidson, we have a man of letters who complemented his creative efforts with important social and political commentary. It was Davidson's

brief but active opposition to desegregation orders in Tennessee (his wife was an attorney), that has made him a pariah, but his anxieties over the Second Reconstruction of the 1950s and '60s were hardly unfounded. Decades of social engineering in the public school arena have prevented generations of young people, both white and black, of receiving even a passable education. Meanwhile, city council and school board members in New Orleans and Richmond rename schools, streets, and bridges once named for George Washington, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jeb Stuart. Tolerance, anyone?

An emphasis on regional cultures, combined with the rejection of a centralized regime, remains Davidson's most significant contribution to modern Old Right thought. As important was his career as a great teacher. Although Davidson had his equals among other poets and essayists, his accomplishments as a teacher were monumental. This is Davidson's trump card. We will never see his like again in the classroom. A teacher of both literature and writing (he started the creative writing program at Vanderbilt), Davidson's influence extended to several generations of talented students. Just consider the lineup of accomplished writers who, as young unknowns, passed through his classroom door: Robert Penn Warren, Andrew Lytle, Cleanth Brooks, Jesse Stuart, Peter Taylor, Richard Weaver, Mildred Haun, Richmond Croom Beatty, Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Spencer, Thomas Daniel Young, Robert Drake, James Dickey, Madison Jones, M. E. Bradford, Thomas Landess, and Roy Blount, Jr.

His teaching abilities were felt in a variety of ways. Cleanth Brooks, the most accomplished of all the New Critics, claimed that Davidson first taught him how to read fiction in purely aesthetic terms. In addition, Davidson implored the young Jesse Stuart to stick to that same bardic tradition when celebrating the Kentucky mountain culture Stuart knew so well. M. E. Bradford especially learned from Davidson how the South's conservative political tradition could be defended and advanced. After all these years, Vanderbilt without Davidson—or at least without the traditionalism he long championed—doesn't make much sense. Nowadays, Davidson's influence is likely to be found outside of academia. The leadership cadre in the League of the South is certainly one example. Those were Donald Davidson's spiritual heirs marching by the thousands in Columbia and Montgomery in early 2000, in those "southern pride" demonstrations, reactions to the media/political/big business onslaught against the Confederate flag and southern history in general. They, too, have a long, hard road ahead of them.

Donald, Danny, and Cissy

The Big Ballad Jamboree. Donald Davidson. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. (1996)

The dead, as Andrew Lytle liked to observe, are always with us. Proving Lytle correct, the University of Mississippi Press has published a novel—the only one—by that enduring voice of southern traditionalism, Donald Davidson.

The Big Ballad Jamboree was written in the late 1940s. Unable to land a publisher, Davidson laid the novel aside for other projects. At the time of his death in 1968, no known final draft existed. But family members recently unearthed a completed draft and now Davidson's readers can enjoy the author's talents in a new light. A Fugitive poet, Agrarian essayist, historian, polemist and legendary teacher, Donald Davidson reveals a different side in *The Big Ballad Jamboree*—that of a comic novelist capable of creating a beguiling portrait of Appalachian culture.

Set in western North Carolina during the late 1940s, *Big Ballad Jamboree* is a fairly innocent novel about an infinitely more innocent era. Danny MacGregor is an up-and-coming star in a hillbilly music band that tours the region and makes side money doing radio commercials. Cissy Timberlake, Danny's on-again, off-again girlfriend, has returned from graduate school in New York to complete her doctoral dissertation. Traveling the countryside, she hopes to amass and publish a collection of old Scotch-Irish ballads.

As one might expect, the conflict between modernity and the region's folk culture forms the novel's main theme. The battle is laden with heavy symbolism and telltale vignettes. The Civil War, for instance, is referred to by the locals as "the Confederate War." (When was the last time you heard that?) While Cissy's family, like most of the natives, has left the countryside for the factories, Danny hopes to buy his family's old homestead and restore the place. (As always, Davidson's agrarianism remains rock solid.) At Cissy's college, a student ruefully speculates the day is coming when the school will "bring in some Yankee profs to teach the coeds the psychology of sex and not [to] be all repressed and inhibited."

Cissy believes ballads represent true mountain music; she frowns on Danny's reliance on the more commercialized hillbilly style. A local promoter, on the other hand, worries how the country music culture—ballad and hillbilly—can survive the onslaught of jazz and rock 'n' roll from big-money New York music moguls. It's the postwar era; radio is riding high and television is around the corner. There's money to be made from country music. The genre can hardly surrender the field to less authentic forms of popular culture. Meanwhile, Danny and Cissy have to put up with a phony music professor who wants to steal the songwriting credits from unsuspecting composers.

Happily, an outlet existed that might "put this old country music and new country music together" and allow Danny and Cissy to play "our own songs—[for] our own folks." During the 1940s, Davidson, a longtime professor of English at Vanderbilt, enjoyed attending performances at the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville, an early home of the Grand Ole Opry. The Opry was not an example of commercialism run amok. Davidson correctly saw that a traditional culture could survive, even flourish in this institution.

In the novel, Danny's band, the Turkey Hollow Boys (reminiscent of Roy Acuff's Smoky Mountain Boys) gets a chance to play the Opry—a commercial success that also guaranteed artistic integrity. Cissy likes this turn of events, too. Danny, for his

part, is never jealous of Cissy's rise in academia. Instead, he's mostly curious, even sitting in on her classes. Everything turns out fine in the end, both career and romance-wise. Danny gets the old homeplace back, Cissy is offered a handsome teaching job, and the couple is reunited for good.

No first novel is ever perfect, but *The Big Ballad Jamboree* represents an important addition to the Davidson canon. In his poetry, essays, and history of the Tennessee River, Davidson always stuck to certain themes: the preference for rural life over urban culture, opposition to rampant industrialism, and a rousing defense of the nation's rich and varied regional cultures. *The Big Ballad Jamboree* drives home the same themes, only in a different and, in this case, a more colorful genre. There's something to be said for an artist who takes an uncompromising (and usually thankless) stand over a forty-year publishing history. But it's also why Davidson will be remembered as the quintessential southern writer of the twentieth century.

I.8 The View From Monteagle: Honoring Andrew Lytle on the Occasion of His Centennial

(2002)

"There is only one comfort, and it is the only thing that has been promised: the gates of Hell will not finally prevail." So wrote Andrew Lytle at the end of his moving 1980 essay, "They Took Their Stand: The Agrarian View after Fifty Years."

It sounds desperate, the words of a man at the end of his rope. Then again, we spoiled moderns want to have our way every time with every little thing. Andrew Lytle was not a pessimist. Along with Donald Davidson and Frank Owsley, he was in fact the most unreconstructed of the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*. Lytle never backed down from the social statements and real-life alternatives that book articulated. In his youth, he studied at Harvard and in France. As an aspiring actor, he had small parts in several major Broadway productions. In the late 1940s, he briefly supervised the acclaimed creative writing program at the University of Iowa. Otherwise, Lytle's life was spent in the South, attending Vanderbilt, teaching at Southwestern in Memphis, the University of Florida, and finally the University of the South, near his family's ancestral land in Monteagle, Tennessee. Late in life, Lytle happily settled into a log cabin near that same town. While there, he opened his doors to streams of students, colleagues, and readers. It was, as one friend recalled, the closest thing to a Confederate Valhalla on this fallen earth.

Lytle spent five decades teaching literature. He wrote much literary criticism, publishing, at age ninety, a short reading of *Kristin Lavransdatter*, the famed novel by the Nobel Prize-winning Nordic author Sigrid Undset. This amateur prefers Lytle's nonfiction. Several short stories, including "Jericho, Jericho, Jericho" hit the mark, but his most famous novel, *The Velvet Horn*, grinds along too slowly.

Lytle's dramatic skills, I think, are best on display in his 1975 family memoir, *A Wake for the Living*, and his biography of Nathan Bedford Forrest. His descriptive talents shine forth most brilliantly in "The Hind Tit," the greatest essay in the legendary *Stand* collection. Lyrical, lively, intimate, "The Hind Tit" doesn't preach or analyze, it simply illustrates why an agrarian life is bountiful, harmonious, and organic. The essay memorably dramatizes a republic of families (Lytle's own arresting term), a political arrangement free of state control. Families work their land and jealously guard its environs. Outside that world, real communities do exist. They come together at Saturday night socials. In addition, that same community will help their less fortunate neighbors during times of need. Otherwise, the old saying about good neighbors and good fences holds fast.

At the same time Lytle was writing "The Hind Tit" he was also finishing up his Forrest biography. Lytle's friendship with Allen Tate and the latter's own contacts in the Manhattan publishing world helped to get *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company* in print. Tate had published his own biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis for Minton, Balch and Company. The folks at Minton apparently were pleased enough with those two books to give the Forrest biography a shot. Critics have called *Bedford Forrest* the finest single-volume book ever written about the war. That's only out of 100,000-plus (and counting) other War Between the States titles.

Why Forrest? Well, the Wizard of the Saddle thrived in a world that Lytle himself once knew. As Lytle liked to recall, he was born in a time (1902) that was closer to the twelfth century than to the monstrous one that would triumph during his lifetime. It was, in short, a society defined by honor, courage, and duty. The book itself documents Forrest's battlefield heroics, while damning the psychotic General Braxton Bragg, commander of the Army of Tennessee, a man who refused to understand Forrest's genius, usually regulating him to defensive postures, rather than (as Robert E. Lee might have done) allowing Forrest to conduct offensive operations.

The book is about more than Forrest the warrior. Here is a portrait of a true hero in the classical sense: a man who fights for a cause "that we approve of" (Lytle's own definition), a soldier beloved by own men and his own people, namely the yeomanry of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, places, among others in the South, where towns and counties, schools, and monuments bear Forrest's name and deeds. Forrest was a brave man—during the course of the war, he had no less than twenty-seven horses shot out from under him. He was also a rough customer. Forrest once savagely whipped a deserting soldier in such a fashion that the story quickly became legend in both the North and South. As long as Forrest rode, folks in the mid-South held out hope that their bid for independence might succeed. For them, he was very much an old-fashioned knight.

General William Sherman, on the other hand, held somewhat different sentiments. If Forrest stayed in the saddle, there would never be peace in Tennessee. One hundred thousand men and the entire federal treasury, Sherman felt, should

be put to work to guarantee Forrest's demise. As it turned out, the Army of Tennessee surrendered before Forrest did.

The tragedy, as noted, was that Forrest's talents were never used properly by his superiors. There was Bragg, but also Jefferson Davis's mistakes. In 1864, Davis relieved Joe Johnston of his command (and with it, the successful defense of Atlanta), while placing the impetuous John Bell Hood in charge. Hood too was a brave soldier, but his failed assaults on Franklin and Nashville proved catastrophic for the Army of Tennessee. Ever the gentleman, Davis, while attending Forrest's funeral, admitted his blunders, declaring that he never realized Forrest's greatness or how to most effectively use it. Forrest is a tragic figure, but, like many losers in history, an enduring one. Thanks in part to Lytle's classic biography, Forrest is more alive today than at any time since the end of the war.

Over four decades passed between *Bedford Forrest* and *A Wake for the Living*. Here, the tragedy of American history is played out on a broader scale. Like M. E. Bradford, Lytle believed the nation's great dramas took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both men would agree with Lord Acton, who in a letter to General Lee claimed that what was lost at Appomattox undid the liberties won at Yorktown. Bradford's critique was learned and scholarly. Lytle, being a novelist, gave a dramatic rendering to historical events. For the Revolutionary War, Lytle focused on the victory at King's Mountain, where the tall men of the Carolinas beat back the British in a battle that turned the tide in favor of the rebels. Meanwhile, a middle Tennessee family comes into their own. Then came more conflict. The War Between the States, according to Robert Frost, was "the greatest war since Troy"—in short, another classical republic losing out to imperial forces. Industrialism, overdevelopment, the cult of mammon, and the surrender of the land all slowly followed. Compared to the catastrophe of the war, twentieth-century trends, at least to the American experience, seem anticlimactic.

The younger Lytle was brash, writing *Bedford Forrest* as if the war was still winnable. "The Hind Tit" was part jeremiad, urging his fellow southerners not to toss away their inheritance. "It is our own," he declared at the end of the essay, "and if we have to spit in the water bucket to keep it our own, we had better do it." As the decades passed, an older Lytle waxed more philosophical. With the world he knew falling apart around him, Lytle turned to the idea of Christendom, cultivating a vision of a Christian society. What was Christendom? Mostly, it celebrated man as a craftsman, man working for the glory of God, not for his own aggrandizement; a world, as much as possible, free from greed and envy, and a people not soft or sentimental who too recognized (as Martin Luther correctly declared) the devil as the ruler of *this* world. Hence each generation contends forever against the chaos "always a-pounding on the doors of society." Examples in statesmanship were John Taylor of Caroline and John Randolph of Roanoke, men who opposed the "paper patronage" of Wall Street-style economics, preferring instead the tangible things that come from the earth.

The small farm, as Lytle noted in the title of his essay from *Who Owns America?* secures the state. Not everyone is a farmer, but the bounty from these folks upholds other professions in the community. On the field, there was Forrest, the knight who defended the most vulnerable members of society. Such was true even after the war, when Tennesseans, both white and black, often sought out Forrest's protection and advice when suffering from the ravages of Reconstruction.

Creating timeless literature was Andrew Lytle's great gift. But it was only one aspect of his legacy. Not just the cabin at Monteagle, but the hospitality Lytle brought to all those who journeyed there is embedded in the memories of his legions of friends and acquaintances. Lytle in turn significantly enlightened any function graced by his presence. "Troops file through our fancy age and Andrew Lytle sits on a hill apart," observed Ward Allen in a 1991 essay. "When he comes down to mingle with the world, good cheer overtakes all. Who can forget his speech on the fiftieth anniversary of *I'll Take My Stand*? Grave scholars tickled, fell like children into fits of laughter."

And why not be of good cheer? In the end, Lytle knew who will win. The times are satanic, but modernity is not the last word in the drama of human affairs.

1.9 Richard M. Weaver: Philosopher From Dixie

(Address delivered at Malaprop's Bookstore, Asheville, North Carolina, March 10, 1996)

Richard Weaver's ascendancy into the bloody crossroads of American letters was a most propitious development. By the late 1940s, the once-promising Agrarian movement had long broken up. Only Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, and Frank Owsley, among the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*, still subscribed, with full vigor, to their original positions. But with *Ideas Have Consequences* and other publications, Weaver breathed new life into the conservative southern tradition, carrying it into the post-World War II era. His influence is evident even today as southern traditionalists do battle with their multiculturalist foes.

Born in Asheville, Weaver was raised in Weaverville, a town originally named Dry Ridge but later renamed in honor of a distant relative, Montraville Weaver, a man who founded that town's first university. When Richard Weaver was young, his father died and the family moved to Lexington, Kentucky. From there, Weaver attended the University of Kentucky where he briefly dabbled in the fashionable socialism of the 1930s. But graduate study at Vanderbilt University would send his worldview in a different direction. At Vanderbilt, Weaver was exposed to the Agrarian movement, which, in the mid-1930s, still had great ambitions. However, it took Weaver several more years to completely give up socialism and embrace the traditionalism that characterized his rural upbringing. After quitting his teaching job at Texas A&M, he enrolled at Louisiana State University to complete his Ph.D. requirements. There he wrote his thesis, "The Confederate South, 1865–1910: A Study in the Survival of a Mind and a

Culture.” The dissertation, though yet unpublished, got him a job at the University of Chicago, where he spent the rest of his career.

Weaver is identified with two important twentieth-century intellectual movements. He was the first great disciple of the Vanderbilt Agrarians. As Walter Sullivan observed, he was the Saint Paul of the movement, too young to be one of the original twelve but the most eloquent spokesman the cause ever had. Secondly, Weaver, along with Russell Kirk, was one of the founders of the traditionalist wing of the post–World War II conservative movement.

Weaver earned Sullivan’s lofty praise on the basis of *The Southern Tradition at Bay* and essays on southern history, politics, and literature. He managed to capture the essence of southern civilization in one short, illuminating definition: the South was the “last non-materialistic civilization in the Western world.” It was a society where the questions Where are you from? and Where are you heading? were more important than, say, What are you worth? Or, as Calvin Brown put it, southerners knew a man might have two million dollars and not be worth two cents.

In short, Weaver saw four distinguishing characteristics of the Old South: the code of chivalry, the education of the gentleman, the feudal system, and the older religiousness.

There were shortcomings to all this. For instance, the education of the gentleman placed too much emphasis on politics and the martial arts and not enough on literature and philosophy. Writers like William Gilmore Simms and Edgar Allan Poe received little recognition in their homeland. Men of the Old South didn’t think much of a career in letters; it was something a man might do for a few years, but not as a lifelong profession. As such, when the war came, the South, Weaver claimed, could never say why it was “right *finally*.” It made legal points, but not a very good metaphysical defense.

These criticisms are not what the reader remembers from *The Southern Tradition at Bay*. The code of chivalry, for instance, was very important to Richard Weaver. This virtue may seem quaint to us, but Weaver took it seriously. He was appalled by the total war of World War II, especially the Allies’ indiscriminate bombing of Dresden and other German cities. Weaver felt that a country that practices total war abroad is not likely to grant many liberties to its own citizens—a point Old Right conservatives have made countless times throughout the years.

There were other aspects about the heritage Weaver admired, including the older religiousness, which was devoid of the skepticism towards Christianity then emerging in both New England and Europe. The education of the gentleman avoided specialization; instead it offered a classical curriculum designed to build a leadership class that provided for a responsible stewardship in times of peace and times of war. Here, Weaver had plenty of ammunition to work with; namely, he could point to the men who founded the first republic of the modern world. Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Randolph of

Roanoke were all products of that education. Mostly, he cited George Washington and Robert E. Lee as the kind of soldier/statesmen that education was capable of producing.

The bulk of *The Southern Tradition at Bay* is spent telling the story of the post-bellum South, a defeated region that remained “unreconstructed and unreconstructable.” Weaver never gave up a romantic view of the South; even the South of the 1950s and ’60s was to him “conspicuous for its resistance to the spiritual disintegration of the modern world.” Apologists for the postbellum South still opposed secular democracy, they defended the particularisms of southern culture; specifically, its agrarian heritage in a nation that was rapidly becoming industrialized. In the 1890s, the United States, with the Spanish-American War, embarked on its own attempts at empire building. This was the Gilded Age, a time of great wealth and poverty, all marked by the rise of urban culture. Many southerners were alarmed by these changes. Albert Taylor Bledsoe declared that the money culture springing up in large cities was “against the spirit of Christianity.” One paragraph from Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* summed up the southern reaction to America’s transformation from a republic to empire:

I am in a sense narrow and provincial, I love mine own people. Their past is mine, their present mine, their future is a divine trust. I hate the dishwater of modern world citizenship. A shallow cosmopolitanism is the mask of death for the individual. It is the froth of civilization, as crime is its dregs. The true citizen of the world loves his country.

In the early 1960s, Weaver wrote an epilogue to the book. It is a very moving essay, containing some of his best writing. There Weaver called on modern man to live “strenuously and romantically” and to rebel against the cradle-to-grave social security state that had taken hold in Europe and North America. *The Southern Tradition at Bay* is a remarkable book on several levels. It is a fine work of literary criticism, an indispensable document of American history, and also a great tragedy. *The Southern Tradition at Bay* is mostly an unforgettable account of how a defeated people reacted to a strange, hostile world they were now forced to live in. It is a story of heroism, defiance, and finally, self-criticism. Despite all this, the book wasn’t published until 1968, twenty-five years after it was completed and five years after Weaver’s own death.

Indeed, Weaver didn’t make his publishing debut until 1948, when the University of Chicago Press brought out *Ideas Have Consequences*. Weaver’s Chicago residency helped him with this book. *Ideas* contained a sweeping criticism of urban life, as Weaver dubbed the mass migrations from the country to the city, a “flight from reality.” But he didn’t like the suburbs any more than large cities. Weaver claimed that the social security state exists mainly to serve a complacent middle class.

In *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver trained his criticism on all aspects of mass culture—tabloid newspapers, movies, radio (this was 1948; television had not yet conquered the American living room), jazz music, “economic democracy” (Weaver would have no use for “It’s the economy, stupid” style politics, preferring instead that a democracy ask deeper, more Socratic questions, such as, What does it mean to be a free man living in a free society?). There were also attacks on “undefined equality” as Weaver predicted the day when women “would be bombed in a foxhole” along with their male counterparts. The consequences? Weaver identified smoldering resentments (“the dynamite which will finally wreck Western civilization”), deeper levels of moral decadence, and most of all, he defined twentieth-century man as a spoiled child. One chapter is even titled the “Spoiled Child Psychology.” This is where the cradle-to-grave social security state leads us.

The prose in *Ideas* is urgent, angry, apocalyptic. Fifty years after its publication, the book has lost none of its ability to sting, provoke, and enlighten the reader. As Weaver wrote to Donald Davidson, the book was written in “words as hard as cannonballs.” Here’s one example:

No less than his ancestors, [modern] man finds himself up against toil and trouble. Since this was not nominated in the bond, he suspects evildoers and takes the childish course of blaming individuals for things inseparable from the human condition. The truth is that he has never been brought to see what it means to be a man. That man is a product of discipline and forging, that he really owes his thanks for the pulling and tugging that enable him to grow—this citizen is now the child of indulgent parents who pamper his appetites and inflate his egotism until he is unfitted for struggle of any kind.

In the book’s final chapters, Weaver constructs a program of restoration built around private property, piety, and truth in the written and spoken word. There wasn’t much of a conservative movement in those heady days of New Deal optimism, but traditionalists did like Weaver’s emphasis on piety; namely, that there are values and mythologies that should be passed on from one generation to the next. Libertarians, likewise, rallied around the defense of private property. Here was something concrete that was free from the whims of the state. Weaver opposed New Deal statism, but he had no use for a libertarianism that rejected distinctions of age, gender, and class. Still, a tenuous coalition between traditionalists and libertarians was attempted, mainly from the legacy of *Ideas Have Consequences*.

The volume lifted Weaver into a whole new world. He was no longer an obscure college professor, but now a spokesman for a new intellectual movement in the country. During the 1950s and early ’60s, he lectured widely and wrote on a regular basis for *National Review* and *Modern Age*. He spoke at a huge rally at

the old Madison Square Garden in New York City, sharing the stage with former president Herbert Hoover, Senators Barry Goldwater and Strom Thurmond, the novelist John Dos Passos, libertarian pioneer Ludwig Von Mises, and the legendary movie star John Wayne. There, Weaver accepted an award from the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). Addressing an audience of 18,000, he was never more eloquent.

It is our traditional belief that man was given liberty to ennoble him. We may infer that those who would take his liberty away have the opposite purpose of degrading him. Too much is being said today about the dignity of man without realization that the dignity of man means the *worth* of man. There can be no worth of man unless there is an inviolable area of freedom in which he can assume the stature of a man and exercise choice in regard to his work, his associates, his use of earnings, his way of life. Little by little this area has been traded away in return for plausible gifts and subventions, urged on by slogans. Now we are at the point where regimentation, which used to be suggested with apologies, comes couched in the language of prerogative.

That speech was given in 1962. Weaver died the following year at age fifty-three of a heart attack in his Chicago apartment. Twenty years after his untimely death, he received what is certainly his highest honor. The Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois, inaugurated the Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters. The institute also gives out a T. S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing, thus elevating Weaver alongside one of the heroic figures of twentieth-century literature. Past winners of the Weaver Award have included Russell Kirk, Andrew Lytle, James Burnham, Edward Shils, John Lukacs, Murray Rothbard, and Forrest McDonald. In 1993, Canton native and all-around man of letters Fred Chappell won the Eliot Award. That year, the Weaver Award was given to Eugene Genovese, the Marxist historian turned southern sympathizer. Chappell and Weaver. Think about it. That was a good night for western North Carolina.

Despite all this, Weaver's influence is not very wide-ranging. It exists on the pages of such journals as *Chronicles* and *Modern Age* and at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, but not on conservative publications with much larger circulations, namely the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*, plus *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard*. If Weaver were alive today, he would be dismayed by what the term *conservative* has disintegrated into. Conservatism is now almost entirely an economic movement that gives lip service to "traditional values." He would have little in common with a party that champions growing, dynamic societies often at the expense of established mores and values. Think, for instance, of conservative support for plans by Disney to build a huge theme park near the Manassas Battlefield in northern Virginia.

Weaver had his own bouts with the high priests of political correctness. Back in the 1950s, administrators at the University of Chicago were not happy with the publicity Weaver's writing was bringing to their institution. With *Ideas Have Consequences* and Frederick Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, Chicago was acquiring a reputation for publishing reactionary texts. When Weaver won the school's annual Quantrell Award for teaching excellence, a dean told him, "Weaver, I hope you take the money and go somewhere else!" Indeed, Chicago would publish no more Weaver volumes. After W. T. Couch, Weaver's fellow North Carolinian, left the university press, Weaver went to Regnery to bring out *The Ethics of Rhetoric*.

The liberals at Chicago were right to fear Richard Weaver. Like all great twentieth-century literary figures, he was a high reactionary against the massive efforts to dehumanize man and destroy ancient pieties. What Weaver had to say about man's nature, that his life is a grand struggle where his soul was at stake; what he said about culture, that it is something more satisfying to us than anything the political state might construct, remains permanent and enduring. Richard Weaver was one of us and I am glad to see a small revival of his work underway.

I.10 M.E. Bradford: History in the Bones

(2010)

No one knew American history like M.E. Bradford. It was in his bones, "felt history," as Robert Penn Warren would term it. Indeed, if any young person asked me about such history, I would only point to those six volumes of essay collections by Bradford sitting on my bookshelf and say, "There it is! Grab 'em and find an easy chair!" Bradford's style, for this day and age when folks have little time to read, could be ponderous, slow going. But like that of his literary idol, William Faulkner, it was worth the effort. Entire sentences and paragraphs are dense, multi-layered in meaning, full of wisdom, presenting, above all, a most authoritative view of history. Just reading the *footnotes* of a Bradford essay is an education. When the editors at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute decided to put together an encyclopedia on American conservatism, they wisely choose Bradford to pen the essay on its southern wing.

Southern conservatism . . . is a doctrine rooted in memory, experience, and prescription rather than in goals or abstract principles. It is part of a nonnegotiable Southern identity with what it *is* prior to what it *means*. Not the consequence of dialectics or reasoning, it emerges from a historical continuum engendered by a recognizable people who have, over a long period of time, a specific set of experiences.

And how! Yes, the southern people, since 1830, have felt history's brute force squarely on their backs, its burden never eased in the slightest. Back in the 1950s, the editors at *National Review* endlessly debated the meaning of conservatism. The southern front, which *NR* courted in those days, needed no tutorials. Southerners were a conservative people. The term didn't need to be defined. It was simply understood as living under laws based upon Christian morality, laws made close to home, far away from a centralized regime. It was a felt conservatism.

M.E. Bradford was a native of West Texas, a U.S. Navy veteran, and a graduate of the University of Oklahoma. He later attended Vanderbilt University, where, according to Tom Landess, Bradford described himself as a "neo-Hegelian." Firmer footing was needed, and the grand Vanderbilt tradition, still alive in the 1950s in the person of Donald Davidson and other faculty members, won Bradford over. That tradition, expressed most famously in *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?*, brought Bradford back home again to the traditionalism he had grown up with, mainly through his father, a West Texas cattleman. And so it was off to the literary-culture-political wars. Bradford found a home at the University of Dallas, a conservative Catholic institution, and a place whose fidelity to that same Vanderbilt tradition was now greater than what existed on the increasingly liberal Nashville campus. Like Davidson, Bradford was both a prolific author and a teacher. During his career, he taught, among other courses, Anglo-Saxon literature, Chaucer, Shakespeare, the English novel, Victorian poetry and prose, American literature, and modern literature.

Bradford was a polymath, excelling in both the study of southern literature and American history. In southern literature, his two main fields were William Faulkner and the Agrarians. Bradford ranks with Cleanth Brooks for incisive Faulkner scholarship. Faulkner, in his politics, was not as conservative as Bradford. But the latter revered the Nobel Laureate for his sense of *pietas*, his love of the southern past. Piety was central to Bradford's thinking. For Bradford, past glories meant both a great literature and a similarly noble political philosophy, the latter of which simply allowed the common man some breathing room from the predatory state. Bradford cited the traditionalism displayed in such Faulkner novels as *The Unvanquished*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *The Reivers*, plus such short stories as "There Was a Queen" and the famous novella "The Bear." He further admired Faulkner's 1952 speech to the Delta Council of Farmers, in which Faulkner praised the courage and self-reliance of the farmers and ranchers who settled America, while also mourning the passing of that spirit in the age of the welfare state.

Bradford's scholarship on the Agrarians and southern literature in general was just as far-reaching. He was friends with most of the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*. He authored a monograph on the poetry of Allen Tate; he collected essays on the fiction of Andrew Lytle; in 1988, Bradford collected Lytle's finest essays in a seminal volume, *From Eden to Babylon*. He extolled that same *pietas* found in the poetry of John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren, plus the

fiction of Walker Percy, Caroline Gordon, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts. In the early 1990s, before his untimely death in 1993 at age fifty-eight, Bradford edited a terrific series of reprints, the Southern Classic series. The perfect man for the job! What a great set of books did he, along with the publisher, John Sanders, reissue. It included works from the antebellum age (Johnson Jones Hooper's *Captain Simon Suggs*, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*), the postbellum age (Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia*, Owen Wister's *Lady Baltimore*, and Richard Taylor's *Deconstruction and Reconstruction*), and most especially, the Fugitive-Agrarian era (Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back* and *Penhally*, Robert Penn Warren's *Night Rider* and *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*, Allen Tate's *Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier* and *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall*, Andrew Lytle's *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company*, Stark Young's *So Red the Rose* and Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Great Meadow*). Most prominent, to me, were Donald Davidson's two-volume history *The Tennessee* and Lytle's family memoir, *A Wake for the Living*. In fact, I have long felt that the latter two works are the finest pieces of literature that the entire munificent Fugitive-Agrarian era produced. Both are full-bodied renderings of American history. On these pages, the old Republic of self-sufficient citizens is not just promising theory. Both, too, are similar to what a critic once observed of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*: rich, lyrical volumes seemingly pulled from the fertile earth itself.

Indeed, the writer that Bradford revered above all was Donald Davidson. "It may be argued that no one person has had a greater part in the development of a profession of letters in the 20th century South than has Donald Davidson," Bradford declared in a 1967 essay, referring to Davidson's influence as a poet, essayist, editor (he did most of the heavy lifting for *The Fugitive* literary journal, while also editing a book page for *The Tennessean*, one that was circulated throughout the South), and teacher. Davidson, as noted, was on the Vanderbilt faculty when Bradford was a graduate student at that institution. I once read their letters while visiting the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at the Vanderbilt library. Davidson and his wife had a daughter, so the correspondence between Davidson and Bradford had very much a father-son ring to it. Davidson referred to Bradford as "Melvin" while encouraging him to earn his Ph.D. (his "union card" as Davidson termed it). Davidson complimented Bradford for getting published in *Modern Age* and advised him not to use so many parentheses in his writing. Bradford, in turn, championed Davidson's poetry in a long essay titled "A Durable Fire," a fine overview of his mentor's poetry and main theme: how the southern people might maintain their distinct culture in the often-hostile postbellum world. He agreed with Marion Montgomery, who rated Davidson's long poem "The Tall Men" as even more satisfying than T.S. Eliot's masterpiece "The Waste Land." Chronicling the rise of Middle Tennessee culture, America's own transformation from a republic to an empire, and finally, the crisis of urbanization, "The Tall Men," according to Bradford, "has a moral and dramatic richness," with its hero "a believable person from an actual community." Further, Bradford titled his

essay collection on southern letters *Generations of a Faithful Heart* in honor of the final line of Davidson's masterpiece, "Lee in the Mountains," a monologue by General Lee as he lived out his final melancholy days at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia. "Generations of A Faithful Heart"—to me the most southern line in the most southern poem by the most southern poet, all championed by Bradford, the most southern critic of things literary and political.

Bradford was a polymath. In 1987, during the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, he traveled the country, lecturing in Illinois, South Carolina, Washington State, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and California, giving talks dramatizing the particularisms of that document and the men who made it. This, mind you, was an English professor doing all these things. Where did it come from? Just love of the old republic, I'd say, love of America's forgotten republican traditions by a man who believed they could be revived by freedom-loving peoples in the heartland.

Earlier, in 1981, Bradford had published another masterpiece, *A Worthy Company*, later brought out by the University of Kansas Press as *Founding Fathers*. It contained brief biographies of each of the fifty-eight men who ratified the Constitution. It was a stupendous achievement. Think about it. Here was this fifth-generation Texan writing scholarly biographies, not just of the Framers from Virginia and South Carolina, but also New Hampshire and New Jersey. College-educated New Yorkers know who Alexander Hamilton is, but do they know all about John Lansing and Robert Yates? Don't worry. This proud son of the Lone Star State would do it for them.

What came out of Philadelphia? Above all a fidelity to limited government, one close to home. "The great art of government is not to govern too much," suggested Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina. Some of the Framers were anti-Federalists, men whose opposition to a centralized regime needs no introduction. (Most anti-Federalists, among them Patrick Henry, opposed ratification, fearing the compromise that made the Constitution would, in fact, lead to a centralized regime). One of the more jealous Framers, Richard Bassett of Delaware, did not want any federal veto powers over the state legislatures.

The Federalists were different, but not so much so. Such men wanted a centralized regime if only to protect their investments or to create a national bank. Chastened by the war experience, the Framers saw the need for a national army, a body to secure the borders and patrol the coasts. What the two sides had in common was a distrust of democracy, of "mob rule," and a corresponding dislike for what Richard M. Weaver might term as an "undefined equality." Many of them, especially Benjamin Franklin, opposed immigration (Franklin thought German immigration would spoil his beloved Anglo Pennsylvania). The Framers were not deists, as revisionists have clumsily sought to claim. Fifty-four of the fifty-eight Framers were Christian, with Episcopalians as the most numerous. The Framers did not seek to exclude religion from public life. Roger Sherman, for one, wanted to begin each legislative session with a prayer (For what it's worth, each session of today's Congress and U.S. Supreme Court begins with a prayer.)

There also was a great emphasis placed on the legislature rather than the executive branch as the most powerful of the governing bodies. (Thomas Jefferson, for one, could envision what a tyrannical monster the courts might become. Still, on the basis of the Tenth Amendment, he gave the final document the nod from his perch as ambassador to France.) What is the purpose of government? John Dickinson, the Pennsylvania farmer/author/statesman, the man who penned the first draft of the Articles of Confederation, gave it a try. As Bradford observed:

[Government should be] able to raise money, provide for defense, conduct foreign affairs, and establish a currency, and also the need to preserve and protect the “agency” of the sovereign states within the new system. [Dickinson] was the first delegate to suggest that the states have equal representation in the U.S. Senate.

Recall that during the administration of George Washington, the president would meet with his four cabinet officers at a table in a restaurant in lower Manhattan to hash over the nation’s business. Didn’t cost much, did it?

“And the war came.” That was the title of the final section of *Against the Barbarians*, the last book Bradford published in his lifetime. In the drama of the old America, the ratification debate represented a great burst of creativity, a debate on the meaning of governance and its relation to human nature, which the Framers did not always view as good. The War Between the States, meanwhile, was the Great Disruption. Bradford did not write a great deal about Abraham Lincoln, but he was careful to close his books with a piece on Lincoln. Bradford’s Lincoln scholarship caused great fireworks, and was a prime reason for his defeat denying him chairmanship of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 1982. Closing his books with a Lincoln essay was his way of saying to the powers that be “I’m not backing down.”

Sam Francis and myself once had a chat on the war and its influence on American history. Many traditionalists still regard April 9, 1865, as the Old Republic’s end date. Sam and I agreed it was a blow, but not as fatal as the revolutions that followed: World War I, the New Deal, World War II, the Warren Court, the Great Society, plus the anti-Western ideology behind school busing, affirmative action, and mass Third World immigration. (Policies that Lincoln would have vociferously opposed.) A healthy portion of America’s republican heritage survived the War Between the States. After all, Reconstruction ended only because folks up North were disgusted with the looting of the South and the intransigence of the Radical Republicans. Still, the war, like all great conflicts, mattered enormously. The nation’s transformation from an agrarian republic to an urban/industrial democracy happened not gradually as in, say, Switzerland but with a violent jolt forward. America was thrust into a new world almost overnight. Bradford was not the first to challenge the Lincoln myth. Think of the criticism leveled by Edgar Lee Masters (his 1931 critical biography of Lincoln was publicly criticized

by members of Congress), H. L. Mencken, and Edmund Wilson. Still, Bradford's scholarship inaugurated a new era of revisionism on the war, one culminating with the work of Thomas E. Woods Jr., Charles Adams, and Thomas DiLorenzo.

Much of Bradford's work echoed an earlier conservative critique. Back in the 1960s, Frank Meyer, longtime senior editor at *National Review*, claimed that the excesses of the Lincoln years set the stage for the New Deal, then the sworn enemy of conservatives of all stripes. Bradford's scholarship essentially revived that thinking: when did the curse of big government commence? Mostly, the critique was about consolidating power: suspending *habeas corpus*, closing down opposition newspapers, seizing property, introducing a graduated tax system, interfering in state and national elections. There was, as Bradford termed it, Lincoln's disavowal of ancient Christian codes during wartime. While tolerating the "total war" tactics of Sherman and Sheridan, Lincoln also hoped for an insurrection "of some sort" in the South, one that would force the Confederacy to fight a battle on two fronts.

Above all, the face of the presidency changed. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson might have tolerated being called "Your Excellency," but they hardly embraced big government. With not just the War Between the States but the wars waged by Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the presidency now took the form of a demigod's office. The delicate balance of the young republic was given a terrific blow. The executive branch lorded over the legislature. An American president, for instance, is now our "Commander-in-Chief." The term itself is militaristic. Presidents, in an age of terror, are *expected* to wage war, if only to prove they are not little Jimmy Carters. The cost in the size and power of the government—and what that means to individual liberties—is considered a small price to pay.

A more pleasing philosophy came several decades earlier, from the great Virginian Patrick Henry. For Bradford, Henry and John Dickinson were the two great models of American statesmanship during the founding era.

"The father of all that is characteristic in Southern politics." Such was Bradford's frank assessment of Patrick Henry. Henry did not worship the state; rather he recoiled from "the horror of a totally politicized world." Henry, as noted, opposed ratification of the U.S. Constitution, warning his fellow southerners not to make an alliance with gnostic New Englanders. A lawmaker who only hoped to strengthen the Articles of Confederation, Henry also offered a brilliant vision of liberty, one that anticipated the Vanderbilt Agrarians and such disciples as Weaver and Bradford himself. Patrick Henry's America was not just a nation where people chattered incessantly about liberty. They lived it. It was a life free of the state. It was, indeed, Lytle's Republic of Families:

The best way to know from the inside the kind of America Patrick Henry hoped to leave us intact is to plunge submissively into state and county histories, reminiscences, and letters—into the bygone world of country

and village and town as managed by ordinary citizens. . . . From such studies and from the evidence of American literature . . . we can approach that interior knowledge: for there is theory in the private history of free Americans living privately in communities, within the ambit of family and friends: living under the eye of God out of the memory of their kind.

Bradford, I believe, was an optimist about the future of a constitutional republic, one inspired by past examples he so tirelessly promoted. A republic was America's past. Is it realistic to think it can be part of its future? Come what may, M. E. Bradford was one of those rare writers whose accomplishments can keep the reader happily engaged for a lifetime. In the cause of republican governance, he leaves a daunting legacy for the rest of us to live up to.

I.11 Red's Revenge

Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism. Mark Royden Winchell. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996. Robert Penn Warren: *A Biography.* Joseph Blotner. New York: Random House.

(1997)

Many decades ago, on the Louisiana State University campus, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks made an unlikely duo. A student fondly described the “appearance of the two men, absorbed in earnest conversation, hurriedly crossing the broad lawn from a classroom building to *The Southern Review* office. . . . Brooks having to trot to keep up with Warren's long, jerky stride.”

Little did the LSU authorities know it, but these two Kentuckians had already sparked a healthy revival in American letters. Established in 1935, *The Southern Review*, edited by Brooks and Warren, was quickly recognized as one of the pre-eminent literary journals in the English-speaking world. The two followed that up with the 1938 publication of *Understanding Poetry*, which became the most influential college English textbook of the century.

The good times at LSU, however, didn't last. In the early 1940s, the university, facing a financial crisis, had to choose between *The Southern Review* and the school's popular football mascot Mike the Tiger. The tiger made the cut, *The Southern Review* was disbanded (it would be revived in 1964) and the two co-editors went north, eventually being reunited at Yale University, where their literary careers continued to flourish. Now both Brooks and Warren are subjects of full-length biographies that allow us to once again contemplate the enormity of the southern renaissance.

Robert Penn Warren was the most famous—and most prolific—of the Vanderbilt Agrarians. His 1946 novel, *All The King's Men*, has long been universally hailed as the greatest political novel in American literature. His later poetry brought him well-deserved comparisons to Yeats and Hardy. Warren was the only American to win the Pulitzer Prize for both poetry and fiction. Warren,

along with Eudora Welty and John Updike, might be the most noticeable twentieth-century American writer never to win the Nobel Prize. (William Faulkner won the Nobel in 1950; perhaps that fulfilled the “southern” quota.)

Of course Warren, like any other American writer, suffered his share of trials and setbacks. A freak injury cost him sight in one eye, ruining a planned career in the U.S. Navy. Full of self-doubt about his literary talents, the young Warren attempted suicide while still an undergraduate at Vanderbilt. Like his idol, T.S. Eliot, he was also saddled with an emotionally disturbed first wife. In all, however, Warren’s many years in exile proved an exception to a general rule: Namely, that southern novelists and poets flourish only while staying in their homeland.

Joseph Blotner’s biography is comprehensive enough, but Mark Royden Winchell’s study of Cleanth Brooks is a more satisfying book. It is not just a fine biography, but also a dramatic rendering of twentieth-century American literary history. There are, for instance, brief but fascinating snapshots of the august circle both Brooks and Warren traveled in, including such giants as Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Thomas Wolfe, Donald Davidson, Robert Frost, William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter, Eudora Welty, Richard Weaver, Ralph Ellison, Andrew Lytle, Caroline Gordon, John Gould Fletcher, Louis Rubin and Albert Erskine.

Simply put, the purpose of the New Criticism was to make great literature just as accessible to farm boys at LSU as it was to the sons of the East Coast elite who attended Yale and Harvard. The genre hit its peak with Brooks’s several first-rate studies of William Faulkner. The burden of southern history certainly inspired Faulkner’s great Yoknapatawpha saga. But novels like *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Light In August* are enduring also because they hammered home eternal truths to modern-day readers.

Faulkner, Brooks noted, did not live in a post-Christian world. The product of a traditional society, Faulkner believed instinctively in original sin and thus was able to “recognize evil in the world.” For Brooks, the supposed cultural backwardness of the South (i.e., its fundamentalist Christianity) was in fact a great advantage for Faulkner and other creative artists of the Southern renaissance.

While the Agrarian movement never had any real political influence, the New Criticism, with the help of Ransom’s *Kenyon Review* and first Tate and later Lytle editing *The Sewanee Review*, pretty much ruled the roost at English departments on both sides of the Atlantic. That these proud sons of the Confederacy would so thoroughly dominate American letters had to gall the Ivy League elite. Worst of all, the New Criticism did not exist to advance the cause of American liberalism. Instead it concentrated on the text. The real importance of literature—namely, its study of man’s dual nature, but also the idea that good literature represented “supreme knowledge” of the human experience—was emphasized instead. Ironically, both Brooks and Warren were moderate liberals (according to Winchell, Brooks “enthusiastically” voted for Bill Clinton in 1992). By the 1940s, the New Criticism had supplanted the Marxists who had badly politicized the literature of the previous decade. Every great American

writer, it seemed, had to be a communist sympathizer. Even unsuspecting types like North Carolinian Thomas Wolfe were recruited to write for leftist publications, but he refused to fall for the bait.

And so, a counterattack against the New Criticism was inevitable. Unfortunately, it was wholly unintelligible. In the dreary 1960s, deconstructionists and other moral relativists landed on the scene. The politicization of English departments came back with a vengeance, bringing with it all-too-predictable results. Literature was out. Propaganda was in. Warren complained about a Yale seminar that “consisted only of reading contemporary pornography.” And that was just the tip of the iceberg. Liberal arts universities had begun the long downhill slide to today’s bigoted anti-Western multiculturalism.

Both Brooks and Warren were victims of the boomerang effect. Both, as noted, were liberals without realizing that the 1950s-style liberalism they embraced would lead to today’s anti-Western ideologies. (Donald Davidson and Richard M. Weaver both saw this.) And so, by the early 1970s, Brooks was considered a hopeless reactionary by smart-alecky Yale kids who, naturally enough, already held the usual prejudices about the South. Behind his back, graduate students liked to joke that it was time “to get a shovel and bury Cleanth Brooks.”

The Yalies even began to hold Warren in the same unflattering light, but Red, as Warren was known, got his little revenge. Addressing a graduate school seminar, he asked his students if they could memorize a poem. No, they could not. Well, could they tell the plot of a short story. No go there, either. Warren then personally asked each of the ten students if they could recite a poem. Again, nothing. With that, Warren walked out of the classroom and never taught at Yale again.

Winchell believes the tide is turning; the deconstructionists are in retreat, a traditional method of reading and teaching literature is returning to the university. Perhaps so. Current controversies aside, Winchell’s wide-ranging biography amply illustrates the drama of being a southern writer in a hostile world.

I.12 Thomas Wolfe

The Provincial Traveler

(An address delivered to the Thomas Wolfe Society at the Buncombe County Library, Asheville, North Carolina, October 3, 2000)

Thanks. It’s nice to be here, especially to talk about Thomas Wolfe. When I was growing up in Asheville, Wolfe was one of my heroes, right up there with Richard Petty and Charlie “Choo Choo” Justice, two other Tar Heel boys of some fame.

While anxiously awaiting the publication of his first novel, George Weber, the hero of *You Can’t Go Home Again*, frets over the “[people] at home, whose good opinion he coveted more than that of all the rest of the world combined.” Such sentiments reflect Thomas Wolfe’s own feelings about his

hometown. Wolfe was a novelist who, in his short career, realized his adolescent dreams. He gained international recognition as the most promising novelist of his generation. He helped to spark a great literary renaissance in the South while at the same time receiving comparisons to the masters of the European novel. Yet what folks back home said counted as much as a review in a New York or London newspaper.

Wolfe traveled extensively during his life, to Boston, New York, London, Paris, Berlin, and the American West. Yet we can fairly say that he never left Asheville. Fictionalized as either Altamont or Libya Hill, Asheville figured prominently in all of his major novels.

Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe's famous first novel, is the only one set mostly in Asheville. As an astute critic once observed, a place is never real until it has been written about. With *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe made Asheville real; he put the city on the literary map. Wolfe made Asheville familiar to people who had and who never would see the town. The novel is the story of the Gant family; and especially of young Eugene. Wolfe was lucky enough to be the youngest of a large, boisterous family, a condition that allowed him to witness and later record the family drama. There are numerous themes in this bulky novel. Literature is about timeless aspects of human nature. It also serves as an historical document of nations and their civilization. As with *The Hills Beyond*, a portrait of the old American republic shines through on the pages of *Look Homeward, Angel*. A real community lives on the pages of the novel. Unlike other American novelists of his era, Wolfe was not an expatriate. His novels are a good barometer of his time; not just the Depression years, but the nation that existed before World War I. There are no farmers or factory worker characters in the novel, but Altamont was a typical small town sustained by an agrarian economy. The produce comes from the bounty of local farmers. Folks bought local products and patronized small businesses. W.O. Gant is part of the business community. But he also chops his own wood, makes a fire each morning, and helps to prepare large meals. After getting his children out of bed and presiding over a large, sumptuous breakfast, W.O. walked to work each morning. Wolfe colorfully describes the long, bounding strides Gant took while on his way to another day at the stonecutting shop. Eugene walks to school each day as does his brother Ben to his job at the local newspaper. No one is stuck in traffic or packed into commuter trains as already was the case in the urban Northeast and Midwest.

The novel has other striking characteristics. Most typical is life on the Square, a meeting place in the center of town. The town square is so central to the novel that Wolfe capitalizes the word. Here is where Gant's business (and most others) are located. It is not far from where Ben works or where both Dixie-land, Eliza Gant's boarding home, and Gant's house sit. Political rallies are held on the Square. People gather outside the newspaper office to get inning-by-inning accounts of World Series games. Eugene's beloved library is located on

the Square; on or near it are restaurants, churches, saloons, pool halls, and barber shops. Here was a place to meet, talk, do business, and play out life's dramas.

Then there was family life. Families generally stayed together longer in Wolfe's time. The population—Gant was a notable exception—was not as mobile as it is today. When parents grew old, their children were expected to take care of them. Owning land and a small business was important to both W.O. and Eliza. There was the necessity of providing for a large clan, but as importantly, private property represented real financial freedom.

Many of the conditions described in the novel are alien to us, but they resulted in a great sense of abundance. By that, we don't mean the accumulation of electronic gadgets such as televisions, VCRs, or computers. Instead, the Gant family enjoyed a large fire in the morning, the spacious, cool rooms in their Victorian-style house, and most of all, bountiful meals at the family dinner table. Families often sat down together for not one but all three meals. Wolfe's great lyrical talents, unmatched by any other writer of his era, were never more fully on display than when describing the family meals and in general, the subject of food.

They fed stupendously. Eugene began to observe the food and the seasons. In the autumn, they barreled huge frosty apples in the cellar. Gant bought whole hogs from the butcher, returning home early to salt them. . . . Smoked bacons hung in the pantry, the great bins were full of flour, the dark recessed shelves groaned with preserved cherries, peaches, plums, quinces, apples, pears. All that he touched waxed in rich pungent-life: his Spring gardens . . . flourished in huge crinkled lettuces that wrenched cleanly from the loamy soil with small black clots stuck to their crisp stocks; fat red radishes; heavy tomatoes. The rich plums lay bursted on the grass; his huge cherry trees oozed with heavy gum jewels; his apple trees bent with thick green clusters. The earth was spermy for him like a big woman.

The Gants and other members of the fledging middle class lived an abundant life unknown to today's harried families who rarely have time to sit down and eat a single meal together. Wolfe's characters, eccentric as they are, do exemplify the great Jeffersonian ideal: namely, small landowners (and in this case, small businessmen) constituting the backbone of American liberty, which was then defined as realizing complete freedom from the whims of the state. Phrases like "the responsibility of freedom" so popular in our time didn't exist then. As Donald Davidson noted in his 1936 essay, "Still Rebels, Still Yankees," Americans of the pre-welfare-state era did not talk about the good life. They simply lived it. Such is true of the characters in Wolfe's first novel.

Despite the success of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe would not make Asheville his postage stamp of the world, as William Faulkner did with Oxford and Lafayette County, Mississippi. The novel instead was a springboard for Wolfe to

pursue one of the classic themes in Western literature: the story of the small-town boy who moves to the big city. Asheville's physical surroundings played a great role in this. Growing up in a mountain town, Eugene Gant badly wants to know the great wide world beyond the "distant soaring ranges." The sound of a train whistle is enough to get Eugene's imagination going, to have him dream about far-off places, whether it was in Europe, Asia, or Brooklyn, New York.

The latter, of course, is where the adult Thomas Wolfe would settle, teaching at New York University after receiving a master's from Harvard. New York gave Wolfe a refuge to write about Asheville. The city was also a perfect match for the young Thomas Wolfe. It was the one American city that could satisfy his gargantuan appetite for life. While Wolfe lived and wrote in the big city, his hometown, during the 1920s, boomed along with the rest of the nation. Development disfigured much of the town he once knew. Most dramatic for Wolfe was the city's first skyscraper, the Jackson building, which stands on the same spot where W.O. ran his stonecutting shop. Wolfe was unhappy about the physical changes in Asheville. He also became an unpopular man in town following the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*. All this led to Wolfe's bitter attack in *You Can't Go Home Again* on an American-style greed that he felt was ruining the soul of a once-great nation.

Asheville itself suffered more than the average city during the Depression. As described in *You Can't Go Home Again*, enormous real estate speculation took place during the 1920s. Everyone joined in, and George Webber is ridiculed for holding down a measly \$2,000-a-year teaching job while all his boyhood chums are now driving big cars and wearing fancy clothes. As also chronicled in his fourth novel, the stock market crash devastated Asheville, even causing the mayor to commit suicide. Fittingly enough, it wasn't until 1975 that the city was able to finally pay off its Depression-era debts. That year was also Wolfe's seventy-fifth anniversary, an occasion for both a renewed interest in Wolfe and the city's final act of reconciliation with its most famous son. Things do have a way of coming together.

In the late 1930s, Wolfe tried coming home. By 1936, Wolfe had published a second novel, *Of Time and the River*, to more rave reviews. It even made the best seller lists, selling better, to Wolfe's disappointment, in the Northeast than in the South. Either way, Wolfe's standing as an important American novelist was now secure. Back in Asheville, the Depression gave folks more to worry about than Wolfe's latest autobiographical novel. Time did heal many of the wounds inflicted by the young novelist. And so Wolfe moved back to Asheville, settled in at a cabin in Oteen, and got to work on "The Party at Jack's" section of *You Can't Go Home Again*. Life was fun for a while. Wolfe appeared at several public functions, dutifully apologizing for whatever pain *Look Homeward, Angel* had caused Asheville. He lent his now-famous name to several fundraising efforts, including one for a new auditorium, one that decades later would bear his name. Again, things do

have a way of working out. In return, Ashevilleans welcomed Wolfe home. Soon, it became a pastime of sorts for folks to take a Sunday drive out to Oteen just to “see Tom Wolfe.” Never one to miss out on a party, Wolfe enjoyed treating family and friends and sometimes total strangers to hefty dinners and drinks.

That summer, however, things went sour. While traveling through Burnsville, Wolfe witnessed a shooting incident on that town’s main drag. He was later called to testify at the trial. There, a defense lawyer, covering all the angles, angrily advised the jury not to pay attention to the novelist’s testimony, calling Wolfe “the author of an obscene and infamous book” that “had held up his family, kinfolk, and town to public odium.” The trial brought back bad memories of Wolfe’s earlier estrangement from Asheville. As a result, he went on a Gantian drinking spree and ended up spending a night in the downtown city jail.

In addition, Wolfe’s celebrity status was taking away from time usually spent at the writing table. It was time to leave home again. Before leaving, Wolfe bumped into a childhood friend. Wolfe had a premonition about things, including his own death. He said goodbye to his friend, adding that “you won’t be seeing me around here anymore.” Which turned out to be the case. Wolfe’s posthumous novels, published in 1939 and 1940, received more glowing reviews, inviting comparisons to such greats as Leo Tolstoy. Into the 1940s, Wolfe remained a popular and influential novelist, especially among young people. Consider the titles of first novels by the first generation of post-World War II American writers: *The Naked and The Dead* by Norman Mailer, *The Town and The City* by Jack Kerouac, *Lie Down in Darkness* by William Styron and *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones. All display a strong Wolfean influence and indeed, these authors have never regretted the impact Wolfe made on their formative years.

Wolfe was also the first great writer from North Carolina, a state which has managed, I think, to keep up fairly well with other southern states in producing first-rate novelists, poets, critics, and biographers. Several of them are from right here in Buncombe County: Fred Chappell of Canton, the poet, novelist and critic; Gail Godwin, the novelist from Asheville; and Richard Weaver, the philosopher, essayist and literary critic from the town that bears his family’s name. These writers have had numerous influences on their own work, but all have acknowledged a fondness, if not a debt, to Wolfe.

Thomas Wolfe’s current standing is a constant source of concern for this society and his legion of readers in general. These are hard times for the cause of the humanities. In recent decades, reading the classics or learning foreign languages has been considered impractical for a world made by science and technology. Today, ideologies such as political correctness have made a mockery out of free inquiry and idea of the liberal arts in general. Others such as multiculturalism make no bones about their anti-Western agenda. Thanks to a docile public, these agendas advance with little opposition. Up to ninety percent of all college graduates, according to a study by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, graduate

without ever taking the once-required survey course in Western civilization. English majors at big name universities can graduate without even taking a single course in Shakespeare studies.

This is where Wolfe comes in. There may no longer be that educated class of “common readers” to sustain serious writers. Wolfe himself was a man of the West, well versed in the classics of European and American literature and fluent in several languages, with some knowledge of Greek and Latin. The title of his first novel comes from a line in Milton’s *Lycidas*. The works of his contemporaries, including Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, were infused with similar classical and biblical references. There was an attempt by artists to keep the Western tradition alive in this post-war world of chaos and upheaval. Eight decades ago, Wolfe received the kind of education in Asheville and Chapel Hill that may be nonexistent today. One wonders if the sixteen-year-old Thomas Wolfe knew more about Shakespeare than today’s Ivy League Ph.Ds. But Wolfe is hardly the only victim of today’s destructive ideologies.

Back in Asheville, however, things have been coming along nicely for Thomas Wolfe; that is, with one exception. I want to be brief because this weekend is a celebration of Wolfe’s accomplishments. The exception is, of course, the fire at the Old Kentucky Home. I assume the police have closed the case, but the cause, they determined, was arson. Some individual deliberately tried to destroy the house. You people have probably thought about this long and hard, as have I. Let’s just say these things don’t occur in a vacuum. The Margaret Mitchell house in Atlanta has been burnt not once, but two times. A mural of General Lee in Richmond was recently fire-bombed. These acts of terror would have been unimaginable even a decade ago. Let’s also say that hatred of the past is one of those peculiar American religions. In this context, hatred of the southern past is pursued in this country with a zeal that might make Joseph Goebbels blush. Now, Wolfe was not consciously or defiantly southern as were many of his contemporaries. Still, Wolfe was a key figure in the southern literary renaissance, he is part of a past people have been conditioned to hate. One would hope that people in such high places as the media and the educational establishment, especially in colleges and universities, would practice some evenhandedness when dissecting the southern past. We all wish the Old Kentucky Home a long and happy life once it is fully renovated. Still, teaching hatred for the southern past is not going to let up anytime soon.

Now to more positive trends. Things are coming along nicely for Wolfe. As noted, whatever hard feelings toward Wolfe had generally subsided by his seventy-fifth anniversary. Now there are the additions to the Old Kentucky Home site, the Thomas Wolfe Museum, a plaza named for Wolfe, the Wolfe auditorium with its handsome portrait inside, the statue on Pack Square, and the annual Wolfe conference. I notice that Asheville High School recently staged a production of Ketti Friggs’s adaptation of *Look Homeward, Angel*. That didn’t happen when I went there in the 1970s. In short, Asheville wants to remember

Wolfe in the same way Oxford wants to keep the legacy of William Faulkner alive. Unlike Faulkner, Wolfe's future outside Asheville remains a troubled proposition. Just consider the trends briefly discussed in this paper. Still, the books are there, in libraries and bookstores. No young person growing up in Asheville or Buncombe County should miss out on reading the always-vibrant, life-enhancing novels of Thomas Wolfe.

Thomas Wolfe and New York: The Perfect Marriage

(Address delivered at the William Cullen Bryant Library, Roslyn, New York, March 10, 2001)

Thanks. Thanks for coming out on this winter's night. It's nice to be here. Usually, I'm on the other side of the podium at events like these, scribbling down notes. Now I get to stand up here and relax. This is the second time I've talked about Thomas Wolfe during these centennial celebrations of his birth. Last October, I went to Asheville, North Carolina, Wolfe's hometown, to give a talk. It was a lot of fun. Beforehand, I told a friend who owns a local diner that I was going back to Asheville to talk about Thomas Wolfe. He thought that was nice. He also said he too liked Thomas Wolfe, especially one of his more recent novels, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Times have changed. Years ago, I'd bother my friends about Thomas Wolfe. Finally, they'd say, "Yeah, I know who you're talking about. He was the guy who wrote *The Right Stuff*." Admit it. This Thomas Wolfe is an amazing writer: from *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River* to *The Right Stuff* and *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. As Eugene Gant might say of William Shakespeare: W.S., 1616–1916. A long and useful life. Truth is, I've never known anyone who read *Look Homeward, Angel* and didn't think it was the greatest novel they had ever read.

New York City is where Thomas Wolfe spent his adult years. He lived there from 1923 until his death in 1938. Wolfe matriculated at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill when he was 16. After four happy years there, he went to Harvard, spent three years there writing plays, before graduating and securing an instructor's position in English at New York University. In New York, he continued writing and rewriting his plays and, unsuccessfully as it turned out, trying to get them produced. Wolfe lived mostly in Manhattan, on the Lower East Side, plus Greenwich Village, and midtown on the East Side. He spent the last two years of his life at the Chelsea Hotel on West Twenty-third Street, also home, throughout the years, to Eugene O'Neill, Brendan Behan, and Dylan Thomas. He also lived for several years in Brooklyn Heights. Today, New York remembers Wolfe, as does Asheville and Chapel Hill. There are plaques on his old residences in Brooklyn and at the Chelsea. This past year, one of his Harvard plays, *Welcome to Our City*, was produced off-Broadway. The "lion library" in midtown had a manuscript exhibit. Chapel Hill inaugurated its annual Wolfe lecture—the *other* Tom Wolfe gave the first talk. Even the postal service came out with a Wolfe

stamp, putting him right up there with Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. Don't laugh. Thomas Wolfe was Marilyn Monroe's favorite novelist.

It was good, I think, that Thomas Wolfe settled in New York. It was a good marriage. Wolfe was a big man, six foot six in size. He was the youngest of seven children, and was very much his father's son. Wolfe took after his father, W.O., a stonemason who moved to North Carolina from rural Pennsylvania, a man known for his occasional binge drinking and his colorful flights of rhetoric, often given on the front porch of his wife's boarding home in Asheville and later immortalized on the pages of *Look Homeward, Angel*. W.O. liked Shakespeare, as did his youngest son. By the time Wolfe was sixteen, he was quite an expert on the Bard, something that would prove most helpful when he began writing his own drama and fiction.

In short, New York was the one city that could satisfy Wolfe's gargantuan appetite for life. Here was a true walker in the city. Wolfe didn't drive; he often skipped the subways or buses, preferring to walk the bridges and avenues. For instance, when he learned that his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, was accepted for publication by Scribner's, the young Wolfe was so amazed that he just began walking. Finally, he noticed that he was in a strange neighborhood where the people were mostly speaking Italian. Wolfe had walked, without knowing it, all the way from midtown to the old East Harlem in the one hundreds. When he lived in Brooklyn, Wolfe especially loved walking across the Brooklyn Bridge. Wolfe would walk from Brooklyn Heights to the Scribner's office, even in the rain, often chanting, "I wrote 10,000 words today." Actually, the number was closer to 3,000, but it's the spirit that counts. Again, Wolfe loved that bridge. Only Hart Crane, in his epic poem, wrote as eloquently as Wolfe did about the Brooklyn Bridge. There is a scene in *Of Time and the River*, where Eugene Gant (Wolfe's autobiographical young hero), explains his travels throughout the city to two of his friends, a brother and a sister, who live among their family's wealth in the Hudson River Valley. They are anxious to hear about Eugene's wanderings, so he explains that he likes to walk around the docks of lower Manhattan and especially across the bridge. What bridge, they ask?

What bridge? [Eugene answers.] Great God, the only bridge, the bridge of power, life and joy, the bridge that was a span, a cry, an ecstasy—that was America. . . . The bridge whereon at night he had walked and stood and watched a thousand times, until every fabric of its soaring web was inwrought in his memory, and every stone of its twin terrific arches was in his heart, and every living sinew of its million cabled nerves had throbbed and pulsed in his own spirit like his soul's anatomy.

Wolfe wrote about New York in not just *Of Time and the River*, but in several other major novels, *The Web and the Rock*, *You Can't Go Home Again* and the recently discovered *The Good Child's River*. In 1981, *New York Times* critic Anatole Broyard wrote that *Of Time and the River* represented that last romantic view of life

in New York City. Consider other novels about New York. There have been so many. I hardly know them all. But in recent decades, there has been, for instance, *The Wanderers* by Richard Price, a grim novel about Italian-American blue-collar families and high school gang life in the early 1960s Bronx; *Mr. Sammler's Planet* by Saul Bellow, which uses the Upper West Side as the very face for the collapse of Western civilization; *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney, which also addresses the subject of a young man taking on the big city; and the before-mentioned *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, which satirizes the world of money and power, the class and ethnic tensions that often characterize modern-day New York. They are all fine novels, but not the occasion for soaring, lyrical prose celebrating the city, the kind that perhaps only a dreamer could write. The city, to Wolfe, is where a man finds love and fame. "There is no place like it," Wolfe enthused in one of his many exuberant passages about the city, "no place with an atom of its glory, pride and exultancy. It lays its hands upon a man's bowels; he grows drunk with ecstasy; he grows young and full of glory, he feels that he can never die."

In his famous short story "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," Wolfe even romanticized the borough of parks and churches. There, Eugene Gant walks into a bar, asking for directions to visit certain parts of Brooklyn: Bensonhurst, Canarsie, Flatbush, Bay Ridge, Greenpoint, Red Hook, and Brooklyn Heights. Why? Well, he likes the way the names sound. He wants to see these actual neighborhoods. The barfly, a native Brooklynite, can't understand why anyone would want to visit these places. But Wolfe, ever the romantic, could find beauty and adventure even the dank outreaches of Brooklyn.

Wolfe also wrote of the dark side of city life. He also expressed his revulsion for the mob, or as he described it, these crowds of "blind full," "willful," "evil," "horrible," "meaningless mongrel curs." Wolfe had complex feelings towards New York's population, one much different than the mostly Anglo-Scots-Celtic stock that was predominant in western North Carolina. *Of Time and the River* contains a section on Eugene's friendship with Abe Jones, a young Jewish student from a large household on the Lower East Side. Wolfe would romanticize New York's melting pot of countless different nationalities as representing a true slice of American life. At the same time, however, he was not above making caricatures of those same northern and southern and eastern European immigrant groups. The young Wolfe shared the nativist sentiments held then by the vast majority of his fellow Americans. The older Wolfe was more optimistic about the nation's future. However, by the 1930s, the government had enacted stricter immigration laws. A common culture existed in America during this time of severe economic hardships.

Most of all, the city gave Wolfe a refuge to write about his hometown. This was true for so many other American writers of that era: Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, Edgar Lee Masters, Allen Tate and his wife, the novelist Caroline Gordon; even William Faulkner lived in Greenwich Village for a while. Of course, New York was a much different city decades ago; none the

least being the fact that rooms and small apartments were much easier to rent. A bohemian lifestyle was attainable. New York was where young people from the South or Midwest came to live and to write about life back home.

For Wolfe, that meant *Look Homeward, Angel*, his first and best novel, the autobiographical story of Eugene Gant's coming of age in North Carolina. In fact, it was so autobiographical that Wolfe, under severe criticism from his fellow Ashevilleans, could not return to his hometown for a good seven years. Unlike the other writers I've mentioned, Wolfe wrote eloquently about New York. During his time in the city, he also matured as an artist. He advanced from the romantic view in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River* to the social criticism that distinguishes *You Can't Go Home Again*. Thomas Wolfe was popular in Germany. His books were translated into German, and critics there hailed him as the great American novelist, a worthy successor to the masters of the European novel. Wolfe, in turned, loved the country and its people. As such, the rise of the National Socialists in the 1930s distressed him greatly. In *You Can't Go Home Again*, he presented a memorable portrait of a people now cowed and intimidated by a totalitarian regime. Likewise, Wolfe criticized the greed that he felt had both overtaken his hometown and in general, destroyed the soul of a once-great nation. In the 1920s, Asheville had striven mightily to become a New South city, a place that puts the money culture above all else. But the banks had overlent to real estate speculators. When the crash came in 1929, Asheville suffered terribly. Ironically, it wasn't until 1975 that the city was able to pay back its Depression-era debts. That was the same year as Wolfe's seventy-fifth anniversary, an occasion for the town's final act of reconciliation with its most famous son. Today, there is a plaza and an auditorium named for Wolfe, a museum showcasing his life and works, and his mother's boarding home as part of the National Register. In this case, things do have a way of coming together.

Another important Wolfe novel was *The Hills Beyond*, an unfinished novel about the Joyner family, with one character based on Zebulon Vance, North Carolina's Civil War-era governor. The Joyners were mountain people. Here, rather than greed or a dictatorship, we have a portrait of the Old America; that of the self-sufficient, self-reliant people who settled the land and whose love of liberty created the first republic of the modern world. The old republic lives on the pages of both *The Hills Beyond* and *Look Homeward, Angel*, and this alone is a priceless legacy to leave to future generations of readers.

Finally, Thomas Wolfe was not only a popular author; he was an influential one as well, especially to the generation that came of age immediately after World War II. Such contenders to the crown as Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, James Jones, William Styron, James Dickey, and Walker Percy have long acknowledged their debt to Wolfe. He might have been second only to Ernest Hemingway in inspiring that ambitious generation of authors. *Look Homeward, Angel* itself sold steadily throughout the years, selling, on average, 40,000 copies a year up until the 1960s. The destructive trends that have hammered American culture since

that decade are a subject for another talk. Let us just say that Thomas Wolfe is hardly the only great American writer to be victimized by them. Still, his books are there, in libraries and bookstores, waiting to be discovered by the rising generation. Wolfe's fiction does what all great literature achieves: It is vibrant, life enhancing, in the process opening up the world of possibilities.

I.13 Something of How to Live: The World of Wendell Berry

(2005)

The publication of Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) and John Updike's *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) represented the high-water marks of the immediate post-World War II era in American literature. Both novels are comedies: highly readable, fast-paced tales of middle-aged male protagonists enjoying the abundance of American life. To be sure, both Charlie Citrine of *Humboldt* and Updike's Rabbit Angstrom are seeking a moral center in their lives. They aim to do right by family and friends, those both alive and dead. Also for both, money, women, and jet travel for parts near and far is all within reach. America is the land of milk and honey—and so much more.

By the late 1980s, with such ideologies as multiculturalism in the saddle, writers from that generation—especially those (like Bellow) who took a conservative stand—were targeted for oblivion. But they weren't down for the count. Neither Bellow nor Updike stopped writing. And along came Tom Wolfe, the longtime New Journalist to breathe life into the American novel. Wolfe's models were such naturalists as Edith Wharton and John Steinbeck. Give Wolfe credit. He is the only serious writer known to a morose public. And it is not just due to that white suit. In three novels, he has taken politically incorrect people—Sherwood McCoy, the WASP stockbroker of *Bonfire of the Vanities*; Charles Crocker, the good ole boy of *A Man in Full*; and Charlotte Simmons, the Carolina Christian college co-ed of *I Am Charlotte Simmons*—and made them all sympathetic and popular characters. Being politically incorrect works.

As a mirror for our times, works by Bellow, Updike, and Wolfe are worthy of our scrutiny. Coming around the bend, however, to stand with these greats has been the writing of Wendell Berry. I might not have said this in, say, 1989, but Berry's work in the globalist era has been so prolific and profound that he is now one of the great all-around men of letters for our age.

If William Faulkner was the dominant writer for the first half of the twentieth century, then Berry is a successor for the second half—and beyond. As great as Faulkner was, his canon represents only one side of Dixie. Berry's works serve as a counterbalance. Faulkner is Deep South. The War Between the States is the major historical event. The landed gentry and those seeking such status loom significant, as do the interactions between the races. The Old South in the form of Colonel Sartoris comes into conflict with such greedy New South types as Flem Snopes. Berry's world is the mid-South. Although a native of northern

Kentucky, Berry's fictional settings have the feel, if not the location, of Appalachia. There is no fallen aristocracy, only extended families of yeoman farmers. Finally, World War II and the catastrophic dislocations that followed that great conflict are the defining events.

At the same time, the world of both Faulkner and Berry is small town/agrarian. That much they have in common. Both men disliked modernity. Faulkner clearly preferred turn-of-the-twentieth-century Mississippi, where the automobile had not yet caused its own upheavals. Berry, likewise, has no use for television or airplane travel. For decades he wrote his manuscripts in longhand, and only recently were they completed on a computer rather than the reliable typewriter.

This essay can hardly do justice to the entirety of Berry's works. His emergence as a critic of globalism and American imperialism and as a champion of local cultures has significantly added to the earlier placing of Berry as a favorite of liberal environmentalists. Berry's ever-expanding canon (over thirty works) is divided among poetry, fiction, essays, and short stories. If the prose style of Updike and Bellow fit the temper of our times—energetic, tense, gloomy, and, at times, lyrical—then Berry, again, represents another side to modern letters. His own prose (to borrow from Truman Capote) reads “as clear as a country stream.” Like Hemingway's, his style is direct, but without the cynicism that often characterizes Hemingway's fiction. In his numerous essays Berry relentlessly hammers the corporate culture that has all but destroyed his world. “What Are People For?” is the title of Berry's finest essay collection. Farming is not a metaphor. It is the real thing. Berry champions the farming life not only because it is satisfying but because it also represents a return to localism. Some essays celebrate the joy that comes from a Saturday on the farm with his granddaughter. Others concentrate on the necessities. For instance, what people eat is the first step to old-fashioned liberties. Everything you need is at the local farmer's market with produce from nearby farms, or else it's hanging from the wall of a garage or smokehouse.

On the creative side, Berry's poetry moves between anger and contentment. “The Mad Farmer,” to name one example, secedes from an imperial world he has no desire to fight to one consisting of friends, family, and the expansive, calming countryside. And while much modern fiction drones on with tales of misogamy, adultery, and divorce, Berry simply celebrates “the country of marriage.” Whether through poetry or fiction, there is nothing Berry enjoys more than creating his own universe—not a fantasy one but one comprising a rugged, yet rewarding soil, one where man is determined to achieve self-sufficiency on his own terms.

Berry has published several short story collections. One, *Watch With Me*, which chronicles the lives of Port William families at the turn of the twentieth century, deserves special notice. Here and elsewhere he draws from the Port William “membership”—and all that word implies. It is a membership that gives its inhabitants a degree of security. The members are honor bound to look after

each other in times of strife and misfortune. Folks generally mind their business. But they help each other out in a pinch. Membership has its dues. All must simply adhere to the tenets of self-reliance. Uncle Sam's world of big government and corporate farms is nowhere to be found—or desired. The problem was that over the decades, the membership declined as Port William's heirs could not resist the material temptations of the mid-twentieth century.

Berry's fiction dramatizes that individual freedom achieved within the bounds of civilized communities of like-minded folks. How rare is that! Only consider Jayber Crow, the orphan/barber and hero of a 2000 novel of the same name. Jayber is a bachelor. He never marries. Instead, the membership is his family. When he quits his barbershop, he becomes entirely self-sufficient. He moves to land near the Ohio River. Some of his old clientele still visit him to get good haircuts. Jayber has a nice little black-market business going. He also lives off the land, growing a garden and harvesting from it corn, beans, tomatoes, carrots, and lettuce. Jayber's neighbors chip in to help with additions to the new homeplace. Jayber likes to read. Books are a steady companion to keep his mind occupied. That's how his leisure time is spent. Mr. Gutenberg's invention is his only connection to the modern world. There are other examples of self-sufficiency. Along with community and individual freedom, there is the joy of work. Man finds harmony in nature, in the rhythms of the season and those of daily chores and pleasures. Consider these lines from Berry's 1996 novel, *A World Lost*. In all that I've read of Berry, this passage comes closest to crystallizing what his writing is all about.

There came a morning when I stood in the dust of the road . . . looking at the field, and was overcome by the sudden comprehension of what was happening. The corn was a little above knee-high, the tobacco plants about the size of a man's hat, both crops green and flourishing. R.T. and I were hoeing the tobacco. I could see Jake Branch plowing corn with a riding cultivator drawn by a good pair of mules. . . . Somewhere beyond the ridgetop, Col. Oaks was plowing tobacco with a single mule, old Red, and a walking plow. The air smelled of vegetation and stirred earth. Beside me, R.T. was filling his hoe. Standing there in the brilliance with my ears sticking out under the brim of my straw hat and my mouth probably hanging open . . . I saw how beautiful the field was, how beautiful our work was. And it came to me all in a feeling how everything fitted together, the place and ourselves and the animals and the tools, and how the sky held us. I saw how sweetly we were enabled by the land and the animals and our few simple tools.

How was that world lost? The post-World War II era, more than ever, put a great emphasis on formal education. Berry takes umbrage with the whole idea. The entire purpose of education, he argues, is to take young people away from their family and home, to teach them that their world, is, in fact, "backward"

and no good, and that the good life lies in the professional, specialized world of weekly paychecks and suburban living.

Wendell Berry's agrarian world is not idyllic. Original sin has not been abolished. All the foul things known to man's behavior—adultery, murder, neglect of family and heritage—take place in his fiction. In the fields, unspoken tensions build to the breaking point: brother fights brother, father fights son; a landowner fights it out with an industrious tenant. No one can escape hard work, either. A man still has to break his back for his daily bread—even in 100-degree-plus weather. One scene in *In Memory of Old Jack* takes the reader into a spacious kitchen/dining area where young men and their older foreman are busy enjoying the usual bountiful lunchtime meal. “This ain’t getting it done, boys,” the foreman barks out. And so it’s away from the lunch table with its ham and ice tea and back to the hothouse tobacco barn for more cutting.

The title of this essay comes from Richard Weaver's description of the Old South: we can't go back to that world, but from it, we can learn something of how to live. Wendell Berry's world is alive. There, man is always free. He has liberated himself from the state, and also from the world of bedroom communities, of traffic, layoffs, and low-wage jobs. In *Hannah Coulter*, the elderly Nathan Coulter sneers at his white collar son-in-law who has taken his daughter far from Port William: He's *employed*, old Nathan pithily remarks. That's a no-no. And that philosophy also sums up Berry's defiant stand: Any man who works for another man can never be free.

I.14 The Last Great Virginian

Douglas Southall Freeman. David D. Johnson. Gretna, LA: Pelican.

(2002)

Douglas Southall Freeman was as much a part of the southern literary renaissance of the 1920s and '30s as William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and the Vanderbilt Agrarians. His multi-volume biographies of Robert E. Lee and George Washington—Virginia's two greatest heroes—both won Pulitzer Prizes. For thirty-four years, he edited *The Richmond News-Leader*. Given that city's status and Freeman's own standing as a military historian, he became an important voice not just in Virginia politics but on the national scene as well. During World War II, he carried on an extensive correspondence with Douglas MacArthur and formed a lasting friendship with Dwight D. Eisenhower. Furthermore, Freeman's work schedule was legendary—if not mind-boggling. In addition to editing and writing editorials for a city daily and completing thick biographies and histories, Freeman also gave daily radio commentary. For seven years during the 1930s, he taught journalism classes each Friday at Columbia University in New York City, commuting from Richmond by train. Plus, he served on numerous boards, including, among many others, the University of Richmond, the Southern Historical Society, and the Rockefeller Foundation. You'll just have to read the book to grasp the full scope of Freeman's exhaustive commitments.

Although Freeman's name remains synonymous with Richmond, his family was from more modest stock in southwestern Virginia. Freeman's father, Walker, was a Confederate veteran who despite severe battle injuries fought Lee with all the way to Appomattox. Following the war, Walker became a successful insurance salesman, a position that took him to Richmond, where he served as a top agent for New York Life. Walker was prosperous enough to send his youngest son, Douglas, to McGuire's University School, a prestigious private institution. There, the young Freeman received a classical education, becoming well versed in Greek, Latin, and the works of Shakespeare, training similar to what Thomas Wolfe, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson—to name just three writers—would benefit from years later. John Peyton McGuire, the school's principal, often regaled Freeman's classes with stories of the war, especially the heroism of Robert E. Lee. At age seventeen, Freeman accompanied his father to a Confederate reunion in Petersburg. The sight of elderly, and, in many cases, impoverished veterans moved the young man deeply. Right then, he found his life's work: Freeman was determined to tell the story of Johnny Reb, lest the world soon forget.

Needless to say, he was highly successful. Just go to the Civil War section of any bookstore in America. Douglas Southall Freeman still lives. As the biographer of Lee and the author of a companion three-volume study, *Lee's Lieutenants*, Freeman achieved international fame. His journalism career was just as fascinating, even though his editorials have never published in book form and there are, incredibly enough, no recorded transcripts of his thousands of radio addresses.

Freeman, like most southerners of his day, was a loyal Democrat. As such, he supported the southern-born Woodrow Wilson and the latter's ill-fated League of Nations while also becoming a caustic critic of the Republican Party-dominated 1920s. Freeman, at the same time, did express regrets over America's participation in World War I—sentiments that would influence his future thinking on foreign affairs.

In 1932, Freeman welcomed the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. By the late 1930s, many leading Southern Democrats, including Vice President James Nance Garner, rebelled against the New Deal. Freeman, however, was there first. As early as 1934, Freeman became disgusted with Roosevelt's big-spending ways. In addition, he admonished neutrality as Europe, once again, became engulfed in war. Freeman strongly opposed the sale of decommissioned American naval destroyers to Great Britain, a policy that had near unanimous support from Southern Democrats. "I wish I were in Congress," Freeman wrote in his diary. "If I were, I'd move his [Roosevelt's] impeachment before night." Or as Johnson explains:

Freeman believed most soldiers returned from World War I and gave themselves over to the decadence of the speakeasies, stock speculation, jazz, and loose women. The literature was that of a lost generation; the leaders were machine politicians. Wilson's League of Nations was in shambles.

There was nothing noble to justify the killing fields of France. As such, his advocacy to enter [World War I] was misguided. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, he would do all he could to preserve America's peace and prevent the calamity of another lost generation.

Freeman did support "well-balanced" military aid to the British. And once Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, he was as pro-war as the entire U.S. public, which too had earlier resisted American involvement. When Japan surrendered, Freeman delivered a bombastic radio address (one of the few saved). For Freeman, World War II was a matter of self-defense. The United States had been attacked. It now had no choice but to prevail. Still, the war, as Freeman perceived, served also as an engine for social revolution. Not only did World War II save the New Deal, it allowed it to move towards new stages: urban renewal, judicial tyranny, the Second Reconstruction in the South, and the establishment of an American military empire abroad, one that would beat up on the British Empire and, after appeasing the Soviet Union at Yalta, would now have to contend with a Cold War.

After the war, Freeman's disillusionment with the Democratic Party was reignited. He returned to his old posture of neutrality and fiscal restraint. Freeman opposed military aid to Greece, a nation threatened by a communist insurgency. He even came out against the now-legendary Marshall Plan for Western Europe. By 1946, Freeman was advising Dwight D. Eisenhower to run for president. When Ike made his run in 1952, Freeman headed a group of prominent Virginians in support of Eisenhower's candidacy. In the 1950s, the South was still wall-to-wall Democratic. Freeman's endorsement of a Republican made its own ripples. It also preceded wholesale disillusionment with the Democrats in the Solid South.

Freeman died in 1953. As such, he did not live to witness the Democrats' ever-leftward march. Nor did he see the Democratic South become Republican. Finally, he did not have to chronicle the latter's thirty-year-plus betrayal of their conservative constituency. If Freeman had lived longer, he probably would have agreed with M. E. Bradford that conservative southerners were a people without a political party.

In his amazingly productive career, Freeman published books on various Confederate correspondences, plus a volume on southern writing after the Civil War. He even wrote, but did not publish, a biography of John Stewart Bryan, the longtime publisher of *The Richmond News-Leader*. Still, *R. E. Lee*, his 1938 biography of the famed Confederate, is what Freeman will always be remembered for. Since then, dozens of Lee biographies have appeared. The future will bring even more. All, however, must labor under the daunting shadow of Freeman's four-volume work. From its published date onward, a great debate has raged: is Freeman's biography the definite study of Lee? Or is it too laudatory? The author wisely includes an appendix, briefly tracking *R. E. Lee's* remarkable history. When the volume first appeared, Andrew Lytle, like Freeman a pro-Confederate historian/biographer, criticized the latter's simplistic view of Lee's

human nature. Lytle referred to Lee's regrets at Appomattox, his bitterness over Reconstruction, and feelings of frustration and failure that also characterized the general's final years. That criticism isn't included in this appendix. In short, Freeman rejected biography as a form of psychography. He preferred the more scientific method of minute and painstaking scholarship, all with a reliance on primary sources. At the end of the appendix, Johnson declares *R. E. Lee* to be worthy of its enduring fame, a conclusion I concur with. Critics of Lee, especially Thomas Connelly and Alan Nolan, inevitably descend into demagoguery and bitterness in their briefs against the Marble Man. Easy to see why. Lee's war represented a just cause. The general and his men were merely defending their land and families against a foreign invasion. Johnson is not as polemical, but in the end, Freeman's scholarship is so monumental, his prose written on such a grand scale, the narrative of Lee's life is so dramatic, and the volumes are so accessible for readers of all ages that no other Lee biography can hope to dislodge Freeman's *magnum opus* from its lofty status.

While Johnson clearly admires his subject, he too tries to avoid hagiography. "I have lived sternly," Freeman noted near the end of his prolific career. And how! Did he ever read for pleasure? (At least Freeman wasted little time watching television.) His daily regimen, which would make the most hardened Spartan blush, did result in casualties. Freeman's wife and two daughters idolized him, but his son, James Douglas, had to endure a less than normal father-son relationship. As soon as Freeman finished his morning duties at the *News-Leader*, he came home, had lunch with his wife, took a short nap, and then retired to his house's third-floor studio for hours of research and writing. "I never saw my dad," Doug recalled years later. Freeman's only son battled with alcoholism and failed marriages before coming to terms with his father's legacy.

Johnson also spends a brief chapter gently scolding Freeman on the race issue. You have to wonder why. Freeman considered himself a classical liberal: he was willing to treat anyone as an equal. Freeman supported equality under the law for Virginia's black population, even in instances when such a stand meant threats to his physical health. Freeman, from what I have read elsewhere, would have also supported some form of civil rights legislation. At the same time, he would have certainly opposed the social engineering that took place after his death, including the school busing program that roiled Richmond in the early 1970s, forever obliterating the city Freeman knew and loved.

Freeman was a partisan, but also conciliatory. He preferred "the War for Southern Independence" to describe the late unpleasantness. Still, he was a man of his time. In his day, the ruling elites allowed southerners to fly their flag and honor their heroes. Southerners, in turn, would say nice things about Abraham Lincoln. In 1948, Freeman appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, with portraits of Washington and Lee in the background. On the inside, he was photographed while saluting Richmond's famous Lee monument. This biography will make the reader regret the disappearance of a civilization that could nurture

such a talent as Douglas Southall Freeman. The man's legacy still lives on, not only in his books, but also in a Richmond high school, an annual literary prize, and a scholarly historical periodical, all of which bear his name. And why not? Freeman's life was a sterling inspiration to those who wish to emulate the manly virtues: work, faith, scholarship, perseverance, and civic duty.

1.15 The Lost World of Allen Tate

(2004)

In 1921, Allen Tate, then an undergraduate at Vanderbilt University, read T.S. Eliot's landmark poem "The Waste Land." One can argue that this discovery helped to transform southern literature. For weeks, the young Tate remained obsessed by Eliot's daring use of language. At the time, Tate was part of the budding Fugitive fraternity, exchanging poetry and criticism with, among others, John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson. The Fugitives were determined to liberate themselves from the florid prose that marked some, but not all, post-bellum literature. Eliot's hard-edged poetry was one model, as was the equally unsentimental agrarian verse of Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost. At first, Ransom and Davidson were wary of Eliot's influence, even though both, in time, saw value in the tenets of modernism.

A modernist in poetry, Tate was a romantic on the idea of literature. Not only did literature represent "supreme knowledge" of the human condition, it also could shape society itself. The politician and the businessman, Tate acknowledged in a 1948 essay, hold the reins of power. However, the man of letters can create a language for the power elites to use, all in a beneficial manner. The poet, in fact, could be a somebody. For a while, it seemed possible. With Eliot in London editing *The Criterion* and serving as poetry editor for the firm of Faber and Faber, with Ransom editing *The Kenyon Review*, and, as significantly, with an apolitical (that is, non-liberal) New Criticism in ascendancy in English departments, victory was within reach. Consider only that moment in the early 1960s when President John F. Kennedy invited a whole host of major artists—among them, Tate and his wife, Caroline Gordon, plus other writing couples: Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark, Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Hardwick, Lionel and Diana Trilling, not to mention Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Mark Rothko, Leonard Bernstein, George Balanchine, and Saul Bellow—all to a gala dinner at the White House. Serious literature had a decent foothold in American society.

Tate's contributions to American letters were as a poet, essayist, biographer, novelist, editor, teacher—and not the least as a correspondent. There have been, so far, the published letters of Tate and a variety of other writers: John Peale Bishop, Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, Jacques Martian, and Cleanth Brooks. Tate also carried on a long correspondence with John Crowe Ransom. Curiously enough, Ransom burned all of his received letters, including those from Eliot himself. In

all, up to a quarter of million dollars' worth of letters were sent up in flames by the poet/editor. There's never been a viable explanation, either.

Tate's first published correspondence was with Davidson. The book is a valuable history of both the Fugitive movement and certain controversies behind the making of *I'll Take My Stand*, even though the friendship had its strained moments, due especially to Davidson's feelings of isolation while teaching at the increasingly liberal Vanderbilt campus. The best volume is the collection between Tate and Lytle. I had not known that the two were such close friends. Tate was the most cosmopolitan of the Agrarians. He was comfortable among the literati in both New York and London. Meanwhile, he couldn't tell a hoe from a baseball bat. Lytle, on the other hand, was the only Agrarian who actually practiced subsistence farming. Still, their correspondence is a masterpiece of modern southern letters. There was no competition between the two. They referred to themselves as "brothers" as they ruminated on matters literary, historical, and personal. A panoramic view of the southern literary renaissance, the volume highlights the joys of friendship, the perils of academic life, and the sheer fulfillment that comes from the creative process. It's just as indispensable as *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America*?

As a poet, Tate is most famous for his 1927 effort "Ode to the Confederate Dead," a poem of alienation that critics compared to "The Waste Land." To me, Tate hit his prime in the 1930s, when his lyrical style made him the finest practicing poet in America, Frost included. From that era, I would recommend "Historical Epitaphs," "The Mediterranean," "The Meaning of Life," and "To the Lacemonians." Such poems deal with Western man's fatal break with his classical heritage, while at the same time celebrating the men of the Old Republic: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John C. Calhoun, and the aging Confederate soldiers memorialized in "Lacemonians," a moving poem that was published on page one of *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* on the occasion of a 1936 Confederate reunion. Or, as the man said, published when the South was southern.

In the 1940s and beyond, Tate's output diminished somewhat, but he continued to produce fine poetry, including the Dantesque "Seasons of the Soul" and "Ode to Our Young Pro-Counsels of the Air," a telling antiwar poem that anticipates much modern day criticism of American imperialism. The Revolutionary War was a noble cause and a great victory; both the Civil War and World War I were wars best avoided. Meanwhile, the total war of World War II represented America's final descent into empire—sentiments that were not necessarily shared at the time by Tate's fellow southerners, but articulated by such august contemporaries as Robinson Jeffers.

A leading New Critic, Tate's prose has been conveniently collected in a single volume, *Essays of Four Decades*, now back in print by ISI Books.¹ The 640-page book amounts to an invaluable introduction to great literature, with essays on John Donne, Dr. Johnson, Dostoyevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, John Keats, William

Butler Yeats, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Hardy, Hart Crane, Ezra Pound, and Herbert Read. Included also are essays on the necessity of “tension” in poetry and the function of literary quarterlies, those low-circulation publications that serve as a vehicle to “discredit . . . the inferior ideas of the age by exposing [the public] to the superior ideas.”

As with Davidson, Richard Weaver, and M. E. Bradford, Tate thought long and hard about the fate of the South, the prospects for its traditional culture and the phenomenon of southern letters. “The New Provincialism” attacks the incipient globalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms,” while holding up the modern southern novel as an antidote to an emerging one-world government. Why did the South have a great literature? Tate took on the entire question in a memorable 1964 essay, “A Southern Mode of the Imagination.” Here, in the not-so-distant past, the “world’s attention” was not just on William Faulkner but on a literature that dominated American letters to the point where the region north of the Potomac and Ohio Rivers, Hemingway and Fitzgerald excepted, was now “the stepsister of American fiction.”

Tate claimed southern writers came around to creating their literature the hard way. Southerners were a rooted people; land and place meant something. This gave them a distinct culture, which itself precedes a unique literature. Furthermore, southern literature was highly rhetorical: It was heavy on action and about “people talking,” not a forum for promoting abstract ideas. Southerners were (and are) a conservative people. They rejected any and all kinds of social engineering. Once the South entered the modern world in the 1920s, it did so with one foot firmly in the past. But while it joined that new world, the South, Tate claimed, now saw that “the Yankees were not to blame for everything.” And so, it turned inward, creating “[the] Southern legend . . . of defeat and heroic frustration,” one that was “taken over by a dozen . . . first rate writers and converted into a universal myth of the human condition.” This, as Eliot once observed, meant studying man’s dual nature, both his capacity for evil and his capacity for salvation. The portrait of the Compson family in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* remains the most arresting example of that new literature.

Tate was not as conservative as Andrew Lytle or Donald Davidson. Nor was he quite as liberal as Ransom and Robert Penn Warren. Tate saw much to link the Old South to southern Europe, especially certain rural regions of France. (Warren liked comparing Italy to his homeland.) He also later converted to Roman Catholicism. Even by the 1930s, the younger Tate noted that the South had a religious life; however, it was not “enough organized with the right mythology.” Its Protestantism, as one sympathetic critic has noted, was more suited for a trading and commercial society rather than one built around nonmaterialistic values. Such criticism has its merits, even though it’s a moot point. Consider that southerners, far more than other Americans, view politics in cultural rather than economic terms.

In all, Tate was at his best when envisioning a republic of letters where not only diversity of opinion was allowed, but where serious writers could actually be a force in determining a society's direction. The poet was the bard who could tell his people who they were and where they ought to be going. It's an ideal world, all right: one free from the suffocating ideologies of our time.

Note

- 1 Allen Tate. *Essays of Four Decades*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999. 640 pp.



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PART II

Towards a New Conservatism



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II.1 An Antidote to Multiculturalism

Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind. James E. Person. Lanham, MD: Madison Books.

(1999)

Over the years, the conservative southern tradition has had more than its share of sympathizers and supporters from intellectuals in the Upper Sixteen. During the twentieth century, none was more prominent or more beloved than Russell Kirk. As a young man, Kirk attended graduate school at Duke University. There, he wrote his eventually published dissertation on John Randolph of Roanoke. Kirk also felt a kinship with the South's tragic grandeur. Here was a community still shaken from the "fearful blow" it had received some seventy years earlier. Kirk, too, admired the Old World ways of Charleston and Richmond. The unspoiled southern countryside, like that in his native Michigan, represented a bulwark against a modern Western world cut off from its heritage.

Kirk's biography of Randolph, published in 1951, was the first of many ringing and eloquent blows in the cause of the "permanent things," a phrase Kirk borrowed from his friend T.S. Eliot, but one he made his own. Kirk remains most famous for his 1953 opus, *The Conservative Mind*, a masterstroke that argued persuasively that the Anglo-American tradition was in fact conservative—a conservatism, however, that was not just about economic growth or minor tax cuts but one that emphasized private property, a belief in social classes, "custom, convention, and old prescriptions" while at the same time allowing for the "proliferating variety and mystery of man's existence." The book was both antistatist and a defense of common-sense traditions. Almost immediately, the term *conservative* became intellectually respectable.

Many of Kirk's volumes are collections of essays or newspaper columns. There were also biographies of Eliot, Robert Taft, and Edmund Burke. A book at least as important as *The Conservative Mind* was *The Roots of American Order*. Written for the 1976 bicentennial, it can be read today as an urgent antidote to multiculturalism. Kirk traces the origins of American civilization to the four great cities: Athens, Rome, Jerusalem, and London. His friend M. E. Bradford explained why:

Jerusalem represents . . . faith and pious submission. Athens signifies . . . reason and art: philosophy and the examined life. Rome . . . is law and public order, a notion of the common good. . . . After Rome, comes Jerusalem again—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. . . . Christianity taught of the integrity of the individual soul. In England that translated into liberty under law, the community.

James Person's critical biography is a first book. Repetitious in spots, it is still a comprehension introduction to Kirk's substantial and wide-ranging corpus. For the past two decades, conservatives have been caught up in public policy and

presidential politics. That's fine, but Kirk's writings gave the Right an overarching sense of purpose, a faith and vision undergirding mere policy prescriptions. Ordered liberty, obtained by a strong sense of justice, is another catchphrase describing Kirk's philosophy. While his sometime critic, Frank Meyer, defined conservatism mostly on grounds of individual freedom, Kirk felt more was needed. Rather, an American conservatism would cultivate the old verities of virtue, morality, faith, tradition, obligation, responsibility, and wisdom. Order in the individual would lead to order in the commonwealth. Individual freedom, too, would be meaningless without a sense of community. Like Bradford, Kirk strenuously objected to the idea that culture could be poured down from the top. He also rejected the notion of America as an experiment. Instead, Kirk correctly defined America as a nation of small communities, shaped, as Person points out, by a British culture in its literature, language, legal theory, form of representative government, and mores.

Person examines Kirk's achievements as an historian and as a literary and social critic. He also includes valuable chapters on Kirk's fiction, written from a Christian/humanist point of view, and his economic beliefs. Kirk, like his friend Pat Buchanan, was a trade hawk who also opposed such New Deal programs as Social Security and favored Agrarian-like positions that would "humanize mass production, restore craftsmanship and personal accomplishment to work," and, in general, decentralize industry and show a "more penetrating regard for the claims of rural life."

No matter the subject, Kirk's metaphysical talents were always on display. This was especially true concerning education. For over two decades, he wrote a column on the follies (and occasionally triumphs) of higher education for *National Review*. A product of a small-town public school system, Kirk bitterly criticized the consolidation of rural public school districts, denouncing it as yet another plan for "breaking down regional and vocational distinctions" while taking authority away from parents and communities.

Kirk's career was testament to the decisive role family life plays in anyone's education. His grandfather, a local banker, had volumes of Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and James Fenimore Cooper in his house. The young Kirk devoured their works and put that knowledge to fairly good use throughout the years. Finally, Kirk's views mirror the old education of the gentleman. In one particularly eloquent passage he argued that universities must stress justice over power, order over egotism, honor over success, tolerance over ideology, and the Socratic and Christian proposition that the unexamined life is not worth living.

The Conservative Mind made Kirk famous. It also made him notorious in liberal circles, including those at Michigan State University, where Kirk, then a history professor, was already unhappy with that institution's falling standards (dumbing down existed in the 1950s too). He retreated to Mecosta, a small northwestern Michigan community founded by his ancestors. Like Andrew Lytle in

Rutherford County, Tennessee, or Wendell Berry in Henry County, Kentucky, Kirk did more than pontificate about the good life. He lived it. Still, the train of progress, American-style, chugs along. The survival of small communities seems as perilous as ever. How can the little platoons of family, church, and school, those with deep historical roots, survive in a suburban nation with a rootless, mobile population? Kirk stressed virtue and morality. Today's conservatives would happily settle for the Tenth Amendment solution: if, say, Alabama and Texas want school prayer, that's fine; if New York and California want abortion-on-demand, well, that's not good, but it's up to the people who live there.

Kirk published many great books, most of which, fortunately enough, remain in print. His standing, however, as a founder of modern conservatism is a shaky one at best. Much has happened since the 1950s when Middle America traditionalists held some sway in the movement, and such anti-New Dealers as Robert Taft were held up as examples of conservative statesmanship. Beginning in the 1980s, conservatism has become strictly a Manhattan-Washington affair. The pundits and personalities working on newspapers, journals of opinions, and talk shows emanating from those power centers now rule the roost. Ideology, a trapping that Kirk despised, has won out. The globalist troika of free trade, open immigration borders, and an interventionist, militaristic foreign policy defines American conservatism. We're all one-worlders now. Any dissidents are smeared and savaged. Late in his career, Kirk himself was on the receiving end of an inelegant epithet from Midge Decter concerning the direction of American foreign policy. None of these destructive developments can diminish Kirk's immense achievement. Still, his admirers in the heartland face a long, hard road ahead of them.

II.2 A Bundle of Contradictions

Daniel Kelly. James Burnham and The Struggle for the World. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books.

(2002)

James Burnham was a main driving force behind the "tough conservatism" that characterized *National Review* during its halcyon days of the 1950s and '60s. Indeed, if Burnham is remembered at all today it is among those more somber elements of the American right. There have been several critical studies on Burnham's thinking, including one by the late, lamented Samuel Francis. Daniel Kelly's book is the first comprehensive biography on a man who, in his day, was a writer respected on both sides of the Atlantic.

Kelly devotes much of his time to Burnham's wide-ranging intellectual odyssey. The son of an English-born railroad executive, Burnham was a star student at Princeton University. At age twenty-four, he joined the faculty at New York University, where he would stay until an early retirement in 1949. In his private life, Burnham was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He was a highly formal man, who enjoyed dinner parties, classical music, and proper attire, even

at the breakfast table. In contrast, his professional life was a bundle of contradictions. The young Burnham opposed a rising fascism in Europe. Instead of clinging to America's republican traditions—as did many politicians and the man on the street during the turbulent 1930s—Burnham embraced socialism to oppose the brown shirt menace. (As if there was any difference.) He wasn't a Communist Party member, but instead a colleague and, later, a critic of Leon Trotsky. And so, Burnham would spend his teaching hours pouring over the poetry of T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and W.H. Auden only to give rip-roaring pro-socialist speeches outside the classroom walls.

Burnham, however, could follow no man or any ideology for long. The break with Trotsky was inevitable. Still, Burnham accepted the idea that centralized regimes were here to stay. *The Managerial Revolution*, his 1940 best seller, examined the role of the bureaucracy in shaping not only the fate of individual nations but also the power centers that would rule the world. Burnham himself was between two worlds when writing *The Managerial Revolution*. Sometimes it's hard to discern whether Burnham is praising the managerial state or denouncing it as a grave threat to old-fashioned liberties.

The rise of Soviet communism would move Burnham decisively to the right. By the late 1940s, Burnham's career began to parallel that of George F. Kennan's. Both saw the threat to Europe of a triumphant Soviet power. Kennan wrote the famous "Mr. X" essay for *Foreign Affairs* while serving as U.S. ambassador to Russia. Burnham, in time, would quit his post at NYU to work for the nascent Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Kennan advised a containment policy, a goal that reached its successful fruition with the NATO alliance. Burnham went a step further, arguing for a vigorous rollback of the Soviet empire, even promoting such reckless schemes as a military confrontation with Moscow. Burnham's books ranged from the pessimistic (*The Struggle for the World*, published in 1947) to the more optimistic (*The Coming Defeat of Communism*, published only two years later).

In the early 1950s, Burnham also defended Senator Joseph McCarthy and his crusade against alleged communists in the American government. Burnham had written extensively on "the web of subversion" inside Washington. For his troubles, Burnham was excommunicated from the gaudy circle of New York intellectuals, most of them anticommunist liberals. Philip Rahv, the longtime editor of *Partisan Review*, publicly declared Burnham's career to be finished.

It wasn't so. Burnham was a cool intellectual rarely flustered by his legion of critics. He found a new home at William F. Buckley's *National Review* and a book publisher in the intrepid Henry Regnery. Burnham was never the public figure Buckley would become, but he did have the ear of people in high places. His writings highly influenced the Republican Party's 1952 foreign policy plank, a fateful step in which the GOP shed its traditional isolationism for the building of military bases all over the globe. Ronald Reagan, too, was a fan. Decades later, President Reagan would issue a Medal of Freedom to Burnham, declaring that,

“freedom, reason, and decency have had few greater champions in this century than James Burnham.”

During his *National Review* years, Burnham displayed more inconsistencies. Kelly is correct in claiming that power—who rules, who prevails—was key to Burnham’s thinking. Humans, if they want freedom, had first better gain—and keep—the power to attain such goals. A first-generation Anglo-American, Burnham was also a born imperialist. He mourned the passing of the great European empires, a sentiment most eloquently expressed in the unforgettable opening pages of his 1964 classic, *The Suicide of the West*. Meanwhile, Burnham championed the prerogatives of the legislature in an earlier study, *Congress and the American Tradition*. If such bodies did assert themselves, he felt, that would put the brakes on the “Caesarism” necessary to run an empire. Furthermore, in *Suicide*, Burnham absolutely skewered modern liberalism for its softness and sentimentality. At the same time, his favorite Republican was none other than Nelson Rockefeller, the very face of Republican Party liberalism. Very strange. The problem, at least to me, was a lack of roots. Burnham loved to travel the country, and he admired the spunk displayed by the plain folk in Middle America. Still, he was not as integrated into the old America like such contemporaries as Russell Kirk and Richard M. Weaver. Consequently, his writings often lack of timelessness of those two Old Right greats.

Either way, Burnham kept his eye on the ball. His primary concern, always, was the survival of the West. No weepy follower of one-worldism, Burnham considered the achievements of the West as flat-out superior to whatever the so-called Third World was capable of drumming up. And so, when Jean Raspail published his 1973 classic, *The Camp of the Saints*, the ever-so-prophetic novel about the Third World immigration conquest of Europe, Burnham took notice. As far as I know, Burnham never wrote about immigration (a weakness shared by other *NR* editors). Still, he was a fan of the novel. He also saw that it wasn’t immigration *per se* that caused the final collapse of the West. Instead the act was committed by a guilt-ridden liberal elite, which in the post-colonial age had romanticized Third World peoples to the point where they could never resist the massive, ongoing immigration invasions.

Despite lapses into the leftism of his youth (i.e., supporting the Medicare entitlement), Burnham was not, as Kelly claims, an early neoconservative. Burnham wanted the defeat of communism *and* the defeat of liberalism. Neoconservatives, he claimed, were different. The latter, Burnham maintained, still held “what might be called the emotional gestalt of liberalism, the liberal sensitivity and temperament.” Indeed, neoconservatives have always held up the 1950s as a golden age of liberalism. They should have been kept out of the conservative movement altogether. While acknowledging that Burnham was a thinker hard to classify, Kelly declares that his subject “should be ranked [as] among the more acute interpreters of his time.” His comments are not made with great certitude. Easy to see why. As an old-fashioned man of the classical West, Burnham

represented a near extinct species. His erudition seems beyond not only the spoiled liberal, but also the equally complacent crowd that now wears the conservative label.

II.3 Cant Free Conservatism

The Morality of Everyday Life: An Alternative to the Liberal Tradition. Thomas Fleming. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

(2004)

Over a decade ago, Samuel Francis, Thomas Fleming's longtime colleague-in-arms in the conservative wars, flatly stated that a serious opposition to liberalism no longer existed in the United States. In *The Morality of Everyday Life*, Fleming essentially seconds that claim. This is not just true in a political sense. Conservative intellectuals themselves have surrendered to the dogmas of liberalism. Or as Fleming writes near the end of the book, all of the post-World War II conservative movements "were . . . permeated with the same principles of objectivity, universalism, rationalism, and human rights that are the underpinnings of the liberal tradition." In short, the murderous abstractions that have plagued the world for the past two centuries.

There were some holdouts. One thinks of Russell Kirk and M. E. Bradford, two across-the-board opponents of modernity, or Wendell Berry, another anti-modernist who subscribes to no political label. Still, there can be no argument that present-day conservatives have accepted the liberalism of the 1950s and '60s. Consider only the neoconservatives who trumpet New Deal-Fair Deal-New Frontier liberalism as a golden age. William Kristol has even declared that good things happened during the reign of Lyndon Johnson. Liberalism, among many other things, is about centralizing power. Today's conservatives, as Joe Sobran has pointed out, might claim to be suspicious about state power, except when it comes to war. Then the state is an instrument of good. Conservatives like having power centralized in Washington as a way to pursue imperialism abroad. There's nothing wrong with spending hundreds of billions of dollars on the present (and future) wars and nation-building projects.

Prospects for self-government in this age of American empire and its competition, the European Union, seem pretty bleak. Still, *The Morality of Everyday Life* presents us with an alternative vision, one given with the author's vast and easy knowledge of the Western tradition, especially its literature, philosophy, and theology.

Fleming's diagnosis is similar to Edmund Burke's famous defense of those little platoons of family, church, and neighborhood. Also echoing Burke, Fleming singles out the French Revolution as the true turning point on the road to tyranny. Civilized communities are not made by an "equality" enforced by bombs and bayonets, but by distinctions based on certain talents and aptitudes. Western man needs go back, way back, to the literature of antiquity, to the teachings of

Judaism and Christianity for a better way. First, there is family life, the one port in the storm of an alien and hostile world. As important is a sense of community, including pride in place. Individualism is a myth, creating selfish adults who live only for themselves. A society where loyalties are to love of land and family would not only mean liberation from the state, but a vibrant culture where moral standards are set and creativity flourishes. In addition, the common man might just have some influence over the powers that be hovering above him. In a book chock-full of illuminating examples of lost liberties, Fleming observes:

A shopkeeper might . . . have his way with the *contrada* (neighborhood) in twelfth century Siena and . . . even influence decisions made by the city. A shopkeeper in sixteenth-century Florence might hope to bribe an administrator, but as a citizen of twentieth-century Italy (much less of the European Union of today), he would count for nothing.

Since that world has been vanquished, the author sets his sights on all those forces that have dulled the thinking of modern man. The book, in part, is a populist attack on mass culture and a decadent public that can't shut off the television set. The result is our nation of strangers, a people more concerned with a civil war in the Balkans than, say, the curriculum at their local public schools or the immigration invasion of their once-pleasant states. Manipulation might not always work, but you have to admire our rulers for their cunning. Recall how the war in Iraq was about finding Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. When that turned out to be a lie, the Bush Administration quickly changed gears, claiming the U.S. was overthrowing a dictator and bringing democracy to that far-off nation. What decent-minded American could oppose that?

Beyond decadence, Fleming is here to celebrate the creativity of those small locales that once flourished in the West. Simply consider what a decentralized Germany, Italy, France, or even Iceland once achieved. Educated Americans are familiar with Goethe and Dante, but they are not of today's Germany or Italy, respectively. Rather, they were products of small but sovereign political entities. "The small Tuscan town of Pisa or Siena has probably contributed more of value to world culture than all of the United States throughout its entire history," claims Fleming in his usual arresting style. Further is this observation of the Iceland of epochs past:

For a brief period of two or three centuries, the quarrelsome chieftains and farmers of Iceland created the most brilliant Nordic civilization that has been known, and their literary accomplishments make up a significant part of the Nordic and German cultural inheritance. So long as they were isolated from outside interference, and so long as farmers were able to find sufficient land to feed their families, they could survive their feuds and petty wars. Once power was centralized and they were integrated into Europe, the Icelanders sank into obscurity.

The same fate may await eastern Europeans, who kept their own folk culture alive during the dark decades of Soviet rule. If such nations succumb to Western materialism, then their distinctive folkways might go with it.

Still, as Fleming notes, the first flickers of resistance are appearing in both Europe and America. Some are political movements, such as anti-EU, anti-immigration third parties; others simply exist to celebrate traditional cultures. But so far they are just that, flickers. A light shines nowhere. And as Paul Gottfried has observed, igniting populist movements in an America weighted down by a mobile population, with mass communications and a judicial dictatorship, can be frustrating, if not impossible. Europeans have been more successful in championing regional identities and starting up populist third parties, but no decisive victories have been won.

From time to time, *The Morality of Everyday Life* can be slow going, especially sections on the behavioral process. In addition to being a provocative editor, Fleming is a highly original essayist. The world needs a volume or two of his selected *Chronicles* essays. Above all, *The Morality of Everyday Life* is a refreshing departure from a conservatism that measures success only by Republican Party victories. Fleming gives no quarter to modern liberalism. He is an admirer not only of antiquity but also the Christendom of centuries past, a culture that tolerated no deviance, even from the rich and powerful, such as Henry VIII.

II.4 Clyde Wilson

A Republic, If You Want It

From Union to Empire: Essays in the Jeffersonian Tradition. Clyde Wilson. Columbia: The Foundation for American Education.

(2002)

This generous collection of Clyde Wilson's essays and reviews, a publishing event that should have occurred long ago, places him on the same level with all the unreconstructed greats in modern southern letters: Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, Frank L. Owsley, Richard Weaver, and M. E. Bradford.

Both the title and subtitle are instructive. "Union to Empire" can be read as a consequence of the War Between the States. Following that bloody experiment in consolidation, American imperialism went overseas to wars in the Caribbean and the Pacific, to Europe and all parts of Asia, to, finally, the current warfare in far-off Iraq. However, the subtitle, *Essays in the Jeffersonian Tradition*, points the way back to sanity. These essays serve to remind readers of America's republican heritage: that of a self-sufficient, self-governing people who had no desire (or need) for the welfare state and its crazed offspring, including a judicial tyranny. This 343-page volume represents a withering critique of American empire, but it also closes with the hope that "the preponderance of the American people are still republican at heart."

Like his friend M.E. Bradford, Clyde Wilson is a great teacher, and consequently this collection amounts to a thorough reading in American history. Bradford's landmark studies of the Founding Era revealed such heroes as Patrick Henry and John Dickinson. In addition to the ubiquitous Thomas Jefferson, Wilson's own unsung giants are George Mason, Nathaniel Macon, and St. George Tucker. Mason and Macon opposed ratification of the Constitution, while Tucker was a scholarly critic of that document, fearing, among other things, that the presidency and a feckless Senate, a body not as beholden to the people as the House of Representatives, would lead the country down the road to imperialism and endless wars. Needless to say, Tucker has been proven more prophetic than he would ever want to be.

Furthermore, the book is chock-full of wise and profound insights. Why, for instance, is the decentralization of government functions desirable? "We know that great periods of Western history have been [ones] of multiple and dispersed sovereignty—flourishing liberty for small communities," Professor Wilson observes. "We know that such freedom equals creativity in wealth, art, intellect, and every other good thing."

There is also the author's contention that modern liberalism is not a doctrine, but a *style*, one "that provides its devotees with a sense of moral righteousness without corresponding responsibility in their personal relationship." Or as Professor Wilson has written elsewhere, as long as a politician supports school busing, he can then send his own children to swanky private schools far from the inner city. He can also proclaim his support for "women's rights" while being a serial adulterer.

Plus, there is this nugget on the abortion question: "If it is true that Americans are more pro-abortion now than they were before *Roe v. Wade*, then . . . this indicates how a corrupt government corrupts its people." Finally, Professor Wilson ridicules the idea that true conservatives should bother with the Republican Party. After all these years, it remains a Rockefeller party, at least in who it nominates for president and vice-president and who any GOP president will appoint for his administration. Being the party of Lincoln, the GOP is also the party of union, which translates into the party of centralized power. Was this always so? No one admires Professor Wilson's achievements like myself. Still, Republicans of the old era, from 1876 to 1932, did adhere to Tenth Amendment principles. Consider only the Supreme Court led by William Howard Taft. Congressional Republicans, in recent years, have displayed a desire to reinsert that amendment into the Constitution, as have such current justices as John Roberts, Antonin Scalia, and Samuel Alito. Whether there are enough of them is another story.

Are the American people republican at heart? The coming years will continue to sorely test the idea. At least Professor Wilson's fellow southerners know who they are; they know each other, they have a shared culture, heritage, religion, language, and literature. This may yet prove decisive in the dark days ahead.

So, too, will this volume by as learned and lucid a historian as we have, a book that lays the groundwork for a better world, for those people who both desire a republic and are capable of keeping it too.

The People's Historian

Defending Dixie: Essays in Southern History and Culture. Clyde Wilson. Columbia: The Foundation for American Education.

(2006)

The title of this review suggests that Clyde Wilson is a popular figure, known to the public. It's not the case, at least not yet, but Wilson, who recently retired as a longtime professor of history at the University of South Carolina, has a loyal band of readers and students ranging far and wide across the South and indeed, the nation. The title, I believe, is apt, since here is an academic who is at home with the plain folk of Dixie, who is not alienated at all from the southern people, but who in fact shares their conservative, Christian worldview. Plus, he does it all in a writing style entirely accessible to the common reader.

Suffice to say that Clyde Wilson sees the conservative South as a bulwark against the liberal behemoth of modernity. As an historian, his insights are always fresh, provocative, learned, and, often, surprising. As with John Lukacs, Wilson is an historian who enjoys those unexpected turns, valleys, and ironies that distinguish the pageantry of history. For Wilson, history is a serious, vital discipline. But it can also be fun. This book abounds with such examples. The American West, for instance, is not a place apart from other regions of the country. Instead, "The West is the South. . . . To the extent that the West is a theater for heroic action, rather than just a place to start a new business, it is the Old South transmitted to a new environment."

There is more. Wilson introduces us to studies of black Confederates, including those who fought at Gettysburg. He claims that prior to the 1850s, cities such as New York and Philadelphia had more in common with the cavalier South than with prim and proper Boston. On a somber note, we learn that in 1860 nearly all white southern families were independent landowners. By 1900, up to forty percent of that ethnic group now toiled as sharecroppers, working on another man's piece of property.

Plus, there are history's ever-present ironies. On the matter of southern patriotism, Wilson observes that such emotions are not nationalistic, a celebration of American power and might. Rather, southerners are viscerally patriotic because "true patriotism is always built from the ground up—love of family, community, state, and country go together. Thus it has always been in a healthy society." But Wilson, ever the contrarian, takes issue with the Southland's two-fisted patriotism, noting that the South, since the nineteenth century, has been held up by the powers that be as "The Other, the evil to be exorcized [sic] or the defective to be abolished," a hostility that they are hardly aware of.

This collection has near its end an appreciation of M. E. Bradford, the prolific critic and historian. The placement is wholly appropriate as Wilson is very much the successor to Bradford as an historian in the conservative tradition. I recall an essay on Richard M. Weaver written a little over two decades ago by Fred Hobson. In it, Hobson, although sympathetic to the man's work, confidently declared that Weaver's conservatism was the last of its kind. The times, Hobson asserted, speaking of the post-civil-rights-era South, would no longer allow for such thinking.

Bradford, however, came along to prove Hobson wrong. In a scholarship reminiscent of Russell Kirk, Bradford was able to construct a southern (and American) tradition that was conservative in its insistence on a strictly decentralized government, one informed by the ties of blood and land over any modern abstractions or temptations. Bradford was an English professor, a scholar who wrote on the giants of southern literature: William Faulkner, Donald Davidson Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Walker Percy, John Crowe Ransom, and others, while also penning definite histories of the Founding Era.

Wilson, in turn, is an historian thoroughly at home with the achievements of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American letters. This volume is sprinkled with commentary on not just Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville but such neglected greats as William Gilmore Simms, Thomas Nelson Page, Henry Timrod, and Johnson James Hooper, plus various twentieth-century authors: George Garrett, Mary Lee Settle, and both Wolfes, Thomas and Tom. To Wilson, southern literature, at its best, contains "a moral vision of majesty and complexity," while also providing a mirror on American history, from the frontier to the plantation, the battlefields to the riverboats, and in the case of Garrett and Tom Wolfe, devastating satire on the follies of modern materialism.

Also as with Bradford, Wilson views the Civil War and Reconstruction as the traumatic events that brought down America's agrarian republic, catastrophes even greater than the upheavals of the 1960s and '70s. Both men also see plenty of greatness in the Federalists, the men who approved the Constitution. However, Professor Wilson clearly believes that ratification was a mistake. Or, to borrow a phrase from Bradford, the American Union was "poisoned at the source," courtesy of gnostic New Englanders, the first Americans to reject Christianity *en masse*. The great dividing line in American history is not North versus South or anything so dramatic. Rather, Wilson contends it has been a matter of New England versus America. In the republic's early years, it was not uncommon for folks from the Middle Atlantic states and the Midwest, not to mention the South, to ridicule New Englanders as moralistic busybodies. But with the Union's triumph in the war, plus the increasing urbanization of American life, that same New England ethos won out, spreading westwards from Salem, Massachusetts, to Salem, Oregon, while reconstructing the South through the imposition of a public school system. A "reformist, sentimental, pushy, genteel,

devolved” Puritanism prevailed over the older America’s “leisurely . . . tolerant, openhanded, rural, frontier, traditional, Anglican, gentlemanly spirit,” all of which may explain why George Orwell, for one, always thought the pre-Civil War America was a freer, more interesting, and more innocent place than the nation that evolved after the war.

In 1982, Professor Wilson edited the fiftieth-anniversary sequel to *I’ll Take My Stand*, a volume defiantly entitled, *Why the South Will Survive*. According to published reports, he reiterated those sentiments at a celebration for the seventy-fifth anniversary of *Stand*, one held in 2005 in Nashville. But while reflecting on the non-choice between the two “weird rich boys” (Bush and Kerry) in the 2004 election, Wilson also remarked:

There have been grave mistakes in the course of Southern history, apart from the original one of going naively into a Union with bad people. There was Bragg commanding the Army of Tennessee and Ewell and Longstreet fumbling at Gettysburg. In the same class is the decision of Southern leaders, when they were kicked out of the Democratic Party, to join the Republicans rather than form our own party. As a result we are powerless. It was probably inevitable but nevertheless a great loss. Today there are no Southerners in Congress or in governors’ chairs—only Republicans and Democrats.

Without a political option, the future looks bleak indeed. Still, for those who view the survival of Dixie as a fighting cause, then this volume is a call to action, for it represents a splendid introduction to the always creative culture of a great people.

II.5 The Rest of the Story

The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History. Thomas E. Woods Jr. Washington: Regnery Publishing.

(2004)

To some, the title of Thomas Woods’s instant best seller might seem trivial. However, its contents make bold claims. Everyone wants to be politically incorrect. But what is “political incorrectness?” Professor Woods’s brisk history of the United States is so bold that even conservatives have begun distancing themselves from major portions of the book.

The author hits hard on all fronts. No icon (or iconic belief) in the liberal canon is left untouched. For instance, the early Puritans did not “steal” Indian lands. Rather, both sides, the author contends, made economic exchanges that were beneficial to each party.

On it goes. Quoting H.L. Mencken, the author shows that it was the Confederate soldier, not necessarily his Union counterpart, who fought for

self-government; that American involvement in both world wars could have been avoided (in the case of World War I, involvement extended the war, resulting in catastrophe); the original “big businessmen” were libertarian in economics, with results entirely positive for average Americans; the New Deal did not ease the Depression; the Great Society did not alleviate poverty; the Warren Court heralded a revolution of judicial tyranny that continues to this day.

Professor Woods’s critique extends to those not part of the liberal canon. He is sympathetic to Ronald Reagan’s vision of limited government. Further, the 1980s was not a “decade of greed” (charitable giving grew significantly). And in fact, the Gipper made no headway at all in downsizing the federal Leviathan. Would that Ronald Reagan was as “right wing” as his critics claimed he was. Still, Professor Woods seems to hold out hope that Reagan may yet be the John the Baptist of the anti-big government forces.

Critics have used the usual smear tactics to attack the book by discrediting the author. They sneer at Professor Woods’s position at a community college in Suffolk County, New York, plus his membership in The League of the South. This also is done to prevent serious discussion of the book.

What such critics don’t want you to know is the crux of the book’s argument, for its theme is self-government. That simply is the core of the much-vaunted American “experience.” Consider only this pearl from an 1842 interview with one Captain Preston, an aging Revolutionary War veteran:

JUDGE MELLEEN CHAMBERLAIN: Did you take up arms against intolerable oppression? Captain Preston replied that he had never felt any oppressions.

JUDGE CHAMBERLAIN: Was it the Stamp Act?

CAPTAIN PRESTON: No, I never saw one of those stamps.

JUDGE CHAMBERLAIN: Was it the tea tax?

Captain Preston said no again.

JUDGE CHAMBERLAIN: Were you reading John Locke and other theorists of liberty?

CAPTAIN PRESTON: Never heard of ’em. We read only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts’ Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanac.

JUDGE CHAMBERLAIN: Why, then, did you fight?

CAPTAIN PRESTON: Young man, what we meant in going for those redcoats was this: *We always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn’t mean we should.*

And consider where tyranny leads. The most courageous chapter is a critique of the civil rights era. Ending *de jure* segregation wasn’t enough. Students, white and black, were forced, in some instances, to sit on school buses for two hours a day simply to please the local tyrant in black robes. Education in countless public school districts was ruined; the neighborhoods that once nurtured those schools were obliterated also. Recalling a famous busing crisis from the 1970s,

Professor Woods, a native of Massachusetts, takes his stand with the Boston “ethnics,” Irish- and Italian-Americans, the “Bubbas” of the northeast—a mistake no career-minded journalist or academic would ever make.

Boston’s neighborhood high schools, like South Boston and Charleston High, produced few college-bound graduates, but they did form the nucleus of neighborhood pride. Young boys and girls were eager to grow up and play sports or cheerlead for their local schools. The annual Thanksgiving Day “Southie-Eastie” football game between South Boston and East Boston high schools was an age-old ritual, typically thronged by crowds of more than 10,000. But these community traditions died and the people of South Boston and Charleston could not understand why. It was these communities . . . that people were defending when fleets of buses began rolling past their front stoops in 1974.

The hero of this volume is Thomas Jefferson. The Sage of Monticello was not the only prophet of self-government. From Mel Bradford’s peerless scholarship, one learns that *all* of the signers of the Constitution were fervent states’ rights men. Jefferson is just the most visible, and often the most eloquent. Continuing on the same theme, the author praises the 1920s as the last age of relative normalcy in the U.S., crediting Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge for keeping government small, taxes low, and the economy booming.

The villain, out of a cast of many, is Franklin D. Roosevelt. Ham-handed economics, peacetime deceit, and appeasement of Joe Stalin aside, Roosevelt’s Supreme Court justices flattened the Tenth Amendment, reducing states and localities to mere backwaters of imperial Washington. And since Roosevelt is so lionized by liberal academics, Americans “do not know enough of their own history to be able to challenge any of it, or even to realize that a problem [the end of self-government] exists.”

In an answer to one of his more strident critics, Professor Woods notes that when given a contract to the book, he was held to a word count of 80,000, and so there are no discussions of, say, the Spanish-American War and its consequences. Professor Woods writes from a paleolibertarian point of view, one that places a large emphasis on economics, thus the attack on big government. Still, America is about more than self-government. It was also meant to be an extension of a Western, Christian civilization. Although sympathetic to those who seek to restrict immigration, Professor Woods does not discuss how the massive Third World migrations of the 1980s and ’90s created a favorable atmosphere for such anti-Western ideologies as multiculturalism and political correctness. In his chapter on civil rights, the author cites Zora Neale Hurston, the black novelist who opposed *Brown v. Board of Education*. A kind word about the much-maligned conservative Democrats of that age—such as Sam Ervin or Richard Russell—might have supplemented his argument, also.

These points are minor. Any history that has Thomas Jefferson and Calvin Coolidge as heroes more than qualifies to have “politically incorrect” in the title. Professor Woods has written a gutsy book, even a landmark one. Parents can no longer simply complain about left-wing brainwashing in the schools. They can mount a counter-offensive by buying this book and giving it to their children.

II.6 A Nation of Immigrants?

The Immigration Mystique: America's False Conscience. Chilton Williamson Jr. Basic Books.

(1996)

“The New Class is antirural, anti-Christian, and it loathes American culture. Why shouldn't it love immigration?”

—Chilton Williamson Jr.

In this penetrating, remarkably even-handed book on immigration, Chilton Williamson Jr. comes up with another arresting thought, one that should wake up even the most ambivalent observer of this nation-breaking issue.

Some years ago, Norman Podhoretz . . . remarked that the American Civil War was as ancient and irrelevant to him as the War of the Roses, his own family having arrived in the United States at a considerably later date. As an aging generation of American writers, critics, and politicians regards America before 1865 and the first epoch of mass immigration as irrelevant and in some sense contemptible, so perhaps a coming generation will view America before 1965 [when the nation's current liberal immigration laws were enacted] in the same way.

No one in America is more qualified to write about immigration than Chilton Williamson Jr. One of the most courageous writers of his generation, Williamson single-handedly made immigration an issue at his former employer, *National Review*. After leaving that publication for the more hospitable atmosphere at *Chronicles*, Williamson then saw *National Review* essentially swipe the *Chronicles* position and call for its own restrictions on immigration.

Familiar arguments against immigration on cultural, economic, and environmental grounds are presented in this volume. But *The Immigration Mystique* is the most historical and philosophical tract yet written on the subject. The roots of our immigration crisis lie in a false reading of American history. The U.S. was never intended to be a nation of immigrants. Indeed, the term never appears in the U.S. Constitution, which is why immigration (and citizenship requirements) in the nation's early decades were the domain of the states. None of the Founding Fathers ever uttered the words “nation of immigrants.” From George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, from Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin, all of their comments on immigration were positively restrictionist.

There is also the way American culture is now defined; namely, the rejection of a republic with a British Protestant core for the fantasy that “anyone in the world” can become an American. The U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were products of an Anglo-Saxon-Celtic civilization. In short, it was the character of eighteenth-century Americans and not mere documents that created the first republic of the modern world. Nations are not, as Williamson cites Ben Wattenberg, “just people”; rather they are, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan claims, an aggregate of “people who *believe* they are ancestrally related.” Does anyone believe this condition exists now? Or that it can exist in the future?

The suicidal idea of the United States as a “universal nation” has plagued the nation from its beginnings; however, it wasn’t until the mid-nineteenth century that such juvenile sentiments began to take hold. The Founding Fathers mercifully avoided defining the nation in millennium terms: a constitutional republic was good enough for them. But before and after the Civil War and continuing into the twentieth century, politicians, philosophers, and poets alike could not resist utopian rhetoric. Here are some of the more extreme examples.

- “In the beginning, all the world was American.” John Locke
- “[Americans are] an almost chosen people.” Abraham Lincoln
- “America is eternal.” Ronald Reagan
- “We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance.” Herman Melville
- “For five hundred years, America has been the biggest story in the world.” Ben Wattenberg
- “[The U.S. is] the country of the Future, a heterogeneous population crowding on all ships from all corners of the world to the great gates of North America and quickly contributing their private thoughts to the public opinion, their toil to the treasury, and their vote to the election.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

And so the downhill slide commences, from George Washington’s somber warnings about entangling alliances to our modern-day arrogance. If the United States really is “eternal,” then by all means it can continue to accept over one million immigrants—most of whom are from Third World countries, who don’t speak English, and who are more impoverished than the average dweller of the most desperate American inner city—for all time to come.

However, a universal nation cannot, at the same time, be a Western one. Most of us have learned the hard way what multiculturalism really means. And yet for the most part, the left-leaning conservative elite in Washington and Manhattan still refuses to draw the connection between massive immigration, rapidly changing demographics, and both the rise of multiculturalism and political correctness. In fact, the *Wall Street Journal* has tried to blame the defeat of the morbid Dole-Kemp

ticket, at least in part, on the Buchananite restrictionist wing of the GOP. Liberals like Wattenberg and Moynihan must take the lion's share of the blame for our present predicament, but conservatives sure haven't been much of an opposition party.

Williamson's more controversial statements concern the earlier European immigration of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such migrations fit in nicely with the catastrophic changes wrought by the Civil War. The war heralded the triumph of an urban/industrial society over a hierarchical/agrarian one, thus replacing "the casual and unselfconscious nationalism of the early republican era with an instrumental nationalism better suited to an industrializing and modernizing nation with growing imperialistic ambitions." Our first massive immigration wave fed the growth of the modern Leviathan state.

In fairness, not all early immigration was into urban areas. Many European immigrants settled into the rural Midwest, building agrarian communities rooted firmly in the Jeffersonian tradition. Italian immigrants who settled in West Virginia, Alabama, or Louisiana quickly became southerners, as did previous generations of French and German migrants.

But this was immigration on a much smaller scale. The twentieth-century South never experienced large-scale immigration until Cuban refugees were given preferential treatment following the failed Bay of Pigs military caper in the early 1960s. Unassimilated Latin American immigrants aren't the only reason Florida is the least southern state below the Mason-Dixon line, but, to say the least, it's been a major one. Massive immigration always brings social and cultural upheaval, high crime, and high unemployment rates—which is why it has never had any public support throughout the nation's history. But lest we forget, immigration, for the New Class, drives the engine of an anti-Western cultural and political revolution. Observes Williamson: "[The] American people [in the New Class worldview], being smug, self-righteous, and racist, *deserve* to lose their country to the nonwhite peoples of the world."

Restrictions on immigration alone won't win the cultural war—a more concrete definition of American civilization other than "democratic capitalism" or "equality of opportunity" is needed. But failure to restrict immigration will certainly give the multiculturalists a final victory, namely a future dominated by leftist politics. The hour is indeed later than most Americans care to believe.

11.7 The Unvanquished Senator Helms

Here's Where I Stand: A Memoir. Jesse Helms. New York: Random House.

(2004)

For many conservatives, the publication of Jesse Helms's memoirs is a melancholy event. It reminds them of a time when there was one politician they could count on, time and time again, to take lonely stands against polite (i.e., liberal) opinion. On Capitol Hill, conservatives had no finer champion than Jesse Helms,

the longtime Republican senator from North Carolina. Once he took a position on any issue, foreign or domestic, he stuck to it with a tenacity that was absolutely inspiring. There are principled conservatives in Congress today: Ron Paul and Tom Tancredo, for instance, in the House, and Tom Coburn in the Senate. But there will never be another Jesse Helms. He probably was on the losing end of more 99–1 votes than any senator in history. That distinction alone should earn him a special spot in the right-wing section of heaven.

Here's Where I Stand is no ghostwritten effort. Before being elected to the Senate, Helms enjoyed a successful career in both print and broadcast journalism. His on-air commentary on Raleigh's WRAL-TV gained him enough of a following to make a winning Senate run in 1972. Much of the book comprises reminiscences, including those of the presidents and senators Helms served with. There is also a warm remembrance of his Mayberry-style boyhood in Monroe, North Carolina, along with loving tributes to Dorothy Coble, his wife of over sixty years.

It is Jesse Helms on the issues that gives the book its wallop. To read such sections is to recall what an electrifying political figure Helms was. Liberals could hardly believe that such a figure still existed. The Second Reconstruction of the 1950s and '60s was to have made Helms' hell-for-leather style obsolete. Many southern pols would move left or, to some extent, moderate their style. But not this upstart from North Carolina, a state once hailed as the region's most liberal, the "Wisconsin of the South."

Helms is at his best when tackling what he dubs the "Hot Button Issues." He recounts his bitter criticism with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) once he discovered the dubious "artwork" of Richard Mapplethorpe and such taxpayer-funded worthies as Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ." He revives the long-lost school prayer issue. And he gives no quarter to legalized abortion. At such moments, Helms's courage utterly shamed his enemies. What also shines through is his sincerity when confronting those issues that GOP regulars have long considered irrelevant. For instance, on NEA funding, Helms claims:

The assault on America's basic values by self-proclaimed, self-appointed "artists," who so often assaulted the moral sensibilities of the American people, is real and easily documented. I was happy to do everything in my power to end this funding.

Then on outlawing school prayer:

It is hardly coincidence that banishing the Lord from the public schools has resulted in the schools being taken over by a totally secularist philosophy. Christianity has been driven out. In its place has been enshrined a . . . permissiveness in which the drug culture has flourished, as have pornography, crime, and fornication—in short, everything but disciplined learning.

Finally, on abortion, which is where Helms's eloquence reaches its peak:

I . . . have been criticized for comparing the scourge of abortions with the Holocaust, but I reject such criticism because this is indeed another kind of holocaust. . . . Killing unborn babies has become a tool of convenience in today's permissive society. At latest count, more than 40 million unborn children have been deliberately, intentionally destroyed. What word adequately defines the scope of such slaughter?

That no complete victories have been won on these and other cultural issues is hardly the fault of a single renegade senator. The best Helms could achieve were partial triumphs: The NEA wasn't abolished, but under Dana Gioia's chairmanship, no dirty "art" has been funded, and some worthwhile proposals, including Shakespeare productions, have been launched. In his first term, President George W. Bush signed a bill outlawing partial-birth abortion, and even leading Democrats now proclaim their desire to reduce the number of abortions. Thanks to mid-1980s legislation, Bible clubs have proliferated at high schools across the country. Lack of greater victories, especially on abortion and prayer, is due to the Supreme Court's enduring liberal majority. Helms correctly savages the *Roe v. Wade* abortion ruling as being unconstitutional. He doesn't mention that both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush appointed pro-*Roe* justices. Back in 1980, Helms, a longtime supporter of Ronald Reagan, was mighty upset when the latter chose Bush Senior as his running mate. Both men, however, have journeyed to North Carolina to help Helms win tough re-election campaigns and so the senator's criticism, at least in these pages, is muted.

These are only a few of the controversies Helms addresses. Concerning the civil rights era, Helms delivers no *mea culpa* for his opposition to federal interference in Dixie's affairs. Helms was a most patriotic conservative. He also is a southern patriot. It would have been impossible for him to support court rulings that dictated to southerners on how their public schools should be operated. Helms recalls an earlier era when "black neighbors and white neighbors depended on each other, and the vast majority lived in harmony." What he opposed was social engineering, especially school busing that instead, "fostered hatred and bigotry by polarizing the very people who most needed to work together." Finally, his comments on the consequences of the busing era are typically direct. "The billions being spent today to improve . . . education . . . are our payment on a bill that we created decades ago when we diverted the local schools' priorities from their most important purpose." Although Helms supports President Bush's education program, the prospects aren't very reassuring. In countless districts North and South, the Feds, through mandates by unelected judges, literally ruined the public schools. But don't worry. Those same folks, in this case the U.S. Congress and Executive Branch are going to fix them.

Furthermore, Helms revisits his well-publicized opposition to the federal Martin Luther King holiday. He recites some of the reasons: King's highly critical comments on America's conduct in Vietnam, plus his communist allies ("these agents of overthrow" as Helms terms them). I suspect Helms also acted out of a sense of *pietas*: in the North Carolina of his youth, the third week of January had a Robert E. Lee holiday. Elsewhere, Helms has lamented the passing of the old February 22 America, the long-lost era when George Washington's birthday was a national holiday.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, Helms reigned as the premier outlaw figure on Capitol Hill. By the late 1990s, he was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a position that gave him some standing in Washington. Liberals might have been surprised to see Madeleine Albright attending an event with Helms at the Jesse Helms Center in Monroe. Some conservatives, I'm sure, were similarly uneasy. During the Clinton years, Helms opposed the invasion of Haiti but supported the war against Yugoslavia. His willingness to fight the culture wars was the number one reason conservatives loved Helms. In this book, however, more space is given to foreign affairs. Surprisingly enough, Helms can sound positively globalist when formulating America's place in the world. America, he writes, should "promote the rights of women and children, including women's suffrage in those countries where women . . . do not have the right to vote." He falls for the notion of America as an "idea" and a proposition nation. (How about just a constitutional republic?) Helms even uses Jesus' injunction "From everyone who has been given so much, much will be demanded" to defend his internationalism. However, one seriously doubts that such teachings should mean undermining foreign leaders through economic sanctions, even if such men run a dictatorship. In the same vein, Helms makes this sweeping claim for his home state:

We are a state that welcomes the world, while at the same time wanting to preserve all that we love, all that makes North Carolina great. We are not an isolationist state. Our first settlers were immigrants, and our exports have always been welcome far beyond our borders.

Is all this true? Yes, North Carolina products have made their way to foreign markets. Throughout the past century, however, prominent North Carolina politicians have been antiwar, isolationist even. Claude Kitchin, the House Majority Leader during the administration of Woodrow Wilson, stood against America's entry into World War I. Robert Reynolds, the state's colorful senator who served from 1933 to 1945, was the only Southern Democrat to consistently oppose the similar plunge into World War II. Most recently, Walter Jones, a Republican lawmaker from eastern North Carolina, made a splash by introducing legislation to begin America's withdrawal from Iraq. Furthermore, North Carolina politicians have *not* always welcomed the world to their state. In his day, Reynolds was the

Senate's leading opponent of mass immigration, even at a time when such migrations had been significantly reduced. Sam Ervin, the great conservative Democrat, a man whom Helms counted as a dear friend, was one of the few senators to speak out against the catastrophic 1965 Immigration Act, one that opened the floodgates to the Third World. Ervin did so in cultural terms, mainly by defending the nation's founding Anglo-Saxon-Celtic heritage in the face of such sweeping changes. Meanwhile, the indefatigable Jones has taken his own stand against the illegal alien invasion of once-pleasant North Carolina.

To be sure, when Helms lays out the welcome mat to the world, it has much to do with foreign investment, namely multinational corporations and Fortune 500 companies bringing office parks and factories to North Carolina. However, he also boasts of the large increase in foreign workers in his home state. Those workers include hundreds of thousands of Spanish-speaking illegal aliens, people who bring and implant their alien culture and language with them. Helms likes to joke that when he first went to Washington, he referred to himself, as compared to Sam Ervin, as the state's "liberal senator." Kidding aside, Sam Ervin was more conservative than Jesse Helms. Both men cherished the U.S. Constitution, but Ervin never viewed North Carolina as a Mexican immigrant state nor did he see any need for a messianic foreign policy.

I don't like to be so critical. Reading this book brought back memories of how North Carolina viewed the Helms era. The elites in the media and academia viewed Helms as a colossal embarrassment, a reactionary in their progressive state. For the average Tar Heel, however, Helms was a source of great pride: A courageous man standing alone for causes he believed in. I fully agree with Senator Bill Frist's introduction, which claims that Helms will stand out as one of the greatest leaders the U.S. Senate has ever seen. *Here's Where I Stand* is a remarkable achievement for a man in his early eighties. It is as memorable as the author's long career. I should hope that every Republican Party member of Congress buys and reads a copy of this book. It will teach them that courage and principal can prevail. A politician can take a stand in the defense of controversial positions and still win election after election, even in the face of a hostile and unrelenting media opposition.

II.8 The Devil and Enoch Powell

Like The Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell. Simon Heffer. London: Phoenix Giant.

(1999)

Somber observers have declared Winston Churchill and Enoch Powell as the two greatest Englishmen of the twentieth century. Churchill, of course, remains one of the heroes of our time. Although he has his detractors, Churchill's reputation is secure. When Pat Buchanan questioned the entire Churchill legacy in his 2008 best seller, *Churchill, Hitler, and "An Unnecessary War,"* even such a reliably leftist publication as *Newsweek* sprang to Sir Winston's defense. Powell,

on the other hand, is an unknown in the States but a figure of great controversy and notoriety in his homeland, all due entirely to his famous 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech warning about the dangers of unchecked immigration. His death in 1998 at age eighty-five received as much publicity as the passing of a former prime minister. Powell does not rest easily. After his passing, the BBC ran a program equal to the man’s controversial career. *The Trial of Enoch Powell* dragged the deceased to the bar, with a studio audience deciding whether Powell was a racist or not.

A scholar of the old school, Powell was a man great in every way. At age twenty-five, he was already a professor of classics at Sydney University. When World War II broke out, Powell enlisted, rising to the rank of brigadier general at age thirty-two, making him the youngest such general in all of English history. Powell, in addition, was a linguist of the highest order. He was fluent in nine languages, with reading knowledge in five more. His fluency included modern Greek, plus both classical Greek and Latin—hence, his special affection for the glories of Western civilization. Powell was a prolific author and essayist. Among his projects was a history of the House of Lords, and writings that questioned both the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays and the veracity of parts of the New Testament. But when the British Empire began to unravel in the late 1940s, Powell was alarmed enough to give up academics for a life in politics.

In 1950, he succeeded at public office, winning a House of Commons seat in his hometown of Birmingham. Alas, his life as a parliamentarian—a career he came to love dearly—was not as successful as his academic pursuits.

With Enoch Powell, everything came to a head with that before-mentioned immigration speech. Powell, leftist propaganda aside, had complex feelings over postwar immigration. He opposed the Labour Party-sponsored 1948 bill, one that opened the floodgates to immigration from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean into Great Britain. Powell wasn’t in politics then. As a Member of Parliament, he genuinely hoped that immigrants would assimilate into British life. However, as he saw them being concentrated into large cities and with their numbers—and fertility rates—increasing, he viewed assimilation as an impossibility. Furthermore, by the early 1960s, Powell was getting complaints from both his constituents and local lawmakers on the immigrant takeover of certain Birmingham neighborhoods. There was also the crime factor. Powell did have the ear of the Conservative Party leadership on this issue. In 1966, Party Chairman Alec Douglas-Home delivered a restrictionist speech on immigration, with lines taken directly from Powell’s own comments. In the next two years, however, the Tories, now the opposition party, began to back down. Meanwhile, Powell was still being hectored by his constituents. And so he spoke out. The misnamed “Rivers of Blood” speech has been like a novel or poem that never goes out of print. The controversy surrounding it has never subsided. In the speech, Powell told the story of a constituent, a middle-aged working man with three children. Despondent over mass immigration, the man declared that he

would not be satisfied until his children all emigrated out of England. This same man mistook his changing neighborhood for all of England, despairing, in blunt terms, that within two decades, “the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.” Powell finished his tale with, in my view, the most courageous and noblest words spoken by a major political figure in the final decades of the twentieth century.

I can already hear the chorus of execration. How dare I say such a horrible thing? How dare I stir up trouble and inflame feelings by repeating such a conversation? The answer is that I do not have the right not to do so. Here is a decent, ordinary fellow Englishman, who in broad daylight in my own town says to me, his Member of Parliament that this country will not be worth living in for his children. I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders and think about something else. What he is saying, thousands and hundreds of thousands of are saying and thinking—not throughout Great Britain . . . but in the areas that are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history.

Forty years later, Roger Scruton, a leading British conservative, wondered if Powell should have spoken at all. The arresting lines, “like the Roman I see the River Tiber foaming with much blood,” was denounced by one and all as an invitation to violence. Immigration, Scruton claimed, could no longer be discussed in polite company, lest one was endorsing Powell’s alleged incendiary language. As luck would have it, Powell spoke on the same day that the new Tory leader, Edward Heath, was to give a major address on health care. Needless to say, Powell’s stemwinder upstaged Heath. There were also complaints from fellow shadow ministers. Heath never forgave Powell and the former was immediately sacked from the Tories’ shadow cabinet.

The speech was a broadside heard round the planet. And in this case, the cliché holds. The immigration issue was out of the bottle, courtesy of the most erudite politician in the Western world. In 1973, Jean Raspail published *The Camp of the Saints*, the not-so-futuristic novel about a Third World immigration invasion of not only of the author’s native France, but all of Europe, from England to Russia. By then, anti-immigration parties were being hatched all over the continent. Today, such parties win a solid percentage of votes in scores of European nations. Anti-immigration parties have been part of ruling coalitions in Italy and Austria, while playing a major role in Danish politics. In Switzerland, Norway, and the Netherlands, such parties now poll in excess of twenty percent in multiparty races. The battle rages on, but if a slice of Western civilization survives the twenty-first century, it will be due, significantly, to the inspiration gained from a speech by Enoch Powell to eighty-five people at a Conservative Party club meeting at a hotel in downtown Birmingham. Such are the little events on which history turns.

Powell's political career never recovered from his dismissal from the Heath cabinet. In 1970, Powell pretty much hoped the Tories would lose that year's general election. With Heath discredited, Powell could swoop in and take control of the party. It didn't happen. Heath won the election, and as Simon Heffer relates, Powell was depressed for months over his own party's triumph. In fact, Powell's Birmingham speech laid the groundwork for the Tories' surprise win. In 1969, Heath even traveled to the same location where Powell had given the big immigration speech a year earlier. There, Heath laid down tough proposals for future immigration into the UK. Extensive research of the 1970 election results showed that Powell's huge popularity among the public (he was routinely listed as one of England's most admired men), fueled the Tory landslide. But that was no consolidation to Powell, who more than ever, found himself on the outs with the Tory leadership.

Powell was not a single-issue politician. Not hardly. He was England's greatest opponent of that country being subject to European Union rules and regulations. He was also critical of the entire Cold War hysteria over the Soviet Union and the challenge it presented the West. Powell never thought that the Soviets wanted war with Europe. When, in the months following the end of World War II, it was possible for the Soviets to conquer Europe militarily, they never made the effort. Furthermore, Powell admired Russia and the Russian people. Powell felt that Russia, even under communism, maintained a degree of cultural integrity that his own homeland, now surrendering to Third World immigration, lacked entirely. Upon visiting Russia in 1977, Powell delivered this shocker: "I have seen a nation which in its past honours itself and its future. I wish I thought I had returned to one." I, for one, would not have said that in the 1970s, but today such a statement rings absolutely correct.

Most of all, Powell loathed Britain's complete subservience to the United States. In Powell's youth, little England, a small island nation in the North Sea, commanded the greatest overseas empire in history. Like Churchill, Powell reveled in the awesome magnitude of that empire. As such, Powell chafed under the American alliance. He felt the U.S. was responsible for Britain's withdrawal from India, and for the war debts that made such a concession inevitable. He disliked Britain siding with America on every foreign policy move the new giant undertook. Here, even Powell might have understated the enormity of his homeland's capitulation. In 1945, after 900 years of existence, England virtually stopped being a sovereign nation and began mimicking America on every front. It went from a mighty empire to a captive nation. For instance, if America goes from a predominantly Western culture to multiculturalism, then Britain must follow suit; if America has a Black History month, so too must Britain; if the United States ideologically defines itself as a nation of immigrants, then Great Britain, improbably enough, must also be a nation of immigrants. Then there's the case of the two Georges: In America, it has become impossible to have a national holiday for George Washington; a politician cannot say anything nice

about him in public, lest we be reminded of Washington's slaveowning past. In Britain, Labour politicians furiously scramble to ban St. George's Day parades or, at the least, to rob them of their English character. There are monumental differences. Immigration and multiculturalism are obliterating 200 years of American history. In England, 900 years of history—not to mention the world's greatest literature—are on the line.

"All political lives . . . end in failure because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs," Powell famously observed, thinking, doubtless, of his own travails. Heffer says no; Powell was a success. But in truth, Heffer can only point to Powell's economic theories, his emphasis on prudent budgets and monetarism, both of which influenced Margaret Thatcher's successful tenure. Indeed, many of Powell's colleagues have commented on his lack of political acumen. Powell had many admirers in the Conservative Party, but he never harnessed that support. Worse, he picked unnecessary fights with party leadership. In 1974, while unhappy with the Heath government's pro-Europe leanings, Powell announced his intention to vote for the Labour Party in that year's election. Labour won and Powell's pariah status was solidified. His outspokenness on the Northern Ireland problems alienated Margaret Thatcher, a prime minister who respected and admired Powell. Thatcher also held sympathy for Powell's views on immigration. Instead of cultivating that bond, Powell remained an outcast. Powell should have played the good soldier on any number of issues, while seeking progress on the one—immigration—where he could have succeeded. But he couldn't keep quiet, forgetting always that politics is the art of the possible. Powellism lives, but not in England. Meanwhile, the civilization he loved and honored may yet survive, but throughout Western Europe and North America, it is more imperiled than ever.



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PART III

Patrick J. Buchanan



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III.1 The Wal Mart Economy

The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice Are Being Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy. Patrick J. Buchanan. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

(1998)

Before Pat Buchanan won the New Hampshire primary in 1996, trade was the single biggest issue the candidate's conservative foes used against him. (Interestingly enough, neither immigration nor foreign policy entered into their complaints.) Buchanan was a protectionist whose policies would result in big government. (Never mind that a Buchanan administration would eliminate six cabinet positions, including Education and Energy.) But after New Hampshire, the rhetoric took a sharp turn. Now Buchanan was tarred as a "racist" and a "fascist," and endured even worse epithets. For the liberal/conservative elite, global free trade is one of the great icons, right up there with open immigration and a perpetual war for a perpetual peace foreign policy. Conjuring up Jimmy Carter, Dick Armey even deems free trade a basic human right.

The Great Betrayal opens with a gripping fate of a Fruit of the Loom plant in Rayne, Louisiana, home to 500 female employees, many of them young mothers supplementing their husbands' incomes. One day, near Christmas 1996, the plant, in search of cheap labor, shut down and moved to Mexico, devastating an entire town at what is usually the most joyous time of the year. In Rayne, the ladies worked for six dollars an hour. In Mexico, however, labor costs 50 cents an hour.

To those conservatives who (Bill Clinton or no Bill Clinton) contend that this is the golden age of American prosperity, Buchanan recites a score of chilling economic numbers. Our cultural decline is all too apparent, but on the economic side, things aren't nearly as rosy as *The Wall Street Journal* says they are:

- Between 1972 and 1994, real wages fell nineteen percent, the longest slide in *three centuries*.
- In 1970, the price of an average new house was twice a young couple's income; it is now four times that income.
- Today, sixty-three percent of women with young children are in the workforce. In 1960, the number was eighteen percent.
- In the first six years of the 1990s, the median family income fell six percent. During the Depression-era 1930s, it rose seventeen percent.
- The wages of U.S. manufacturing workers are now below Japan's and are only sixty percent of Germany's.
- The federal tax bite, three percent of the average family income in 1950, is now twenty-five percent.

Add to that this aside. While not a single pair of shoes, a camera, a radio, or a child's toy is made in the U.S., 628,000 of us work for Wal Mart, up from a mere

21,000 in 1978. In a manufacturing economy, a man could still claim to be a genuine craftsman. Working behind the counter at Wal Mart isn't the same thing.

Free-trade ideology is mostly a Cold War phenomenon. Attempts to form a trading body similar to today's World Trade Organization was snuffed out by post-World War II Congresses. But the administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson both made numerous unilateral concessions on trade to American allies whose economies experienced slight difficulties. If a Western or pro-Western nation fell on hard times, why then, they might just turn to Marxist, pro-Soviet measures. Or so went State Department thinking. For Buchanan, the one exception to this sentimental policy was Ronald Reagan. Conservatives constantly hail Reagan as their free-trade guru. In fact, the Gipper slapped stiff tariffs on Japanese automobiles and motorcycle imports, thus saving and revitalizing both the U.S. auto industry and the legendary Harley-Davidson company.

Buchanan's scholarship turns up that all the nation's Founding Fathers were, at least by our standards, protectionist. Free traders Thomas Jefferson and James Madison both came around to the economic nationalist side late in their careers. Mostly, Buchanan hails the post-Civil War Republican party for defending American workers against the ravages of global trade, an ideology that at the turn of the century did such damage to free-trading Great Britain. In fact, GOP-style protectionism, Buchanan claims, led to a decades-long era of economic growth, which enabled America to replace the mother country as the world's great economic power. Industry and cities grew, but not at the expense of the nation's founding agrarian culture. From the end of Reconstruction until the beginning of World War II, America remained a largely agrarian, small-town nation, a condition that accounted for a sound moral structure as well. A proper balance of city life and country life existed even into the 1950s.

Furthermore, as Buchanan illustrates, free traders were also big spenders, while protectionists were tightwads. Woodrow Wilson supported both global free trade, the nation's first income tax, and America's participation in the carnage of World War I. Likewise, Franklin Roosevelt, "the greatest free trader of all," was, as conservatives once understood, "the godfather of big government." Meanwhile, protectionist Calvin Coolidge cut spending to a minuscule three percent of the GNP.

In the globalist versus nationalist struggle of the 1990s, Buchanan has been the most articulate champion of the latter side. But Buchanan's traditionalism also animates his economic policies. The commentator is sure that modest tariffs on other nations in the global south would force more industries to open up shop in America, creating high-paying jobs instead of just low-paying ones at the local McDonald's. Like most conservatives, he also supports a flat tax to drastically reduce the revenue burden. Pat Buchanan's America was not only a nation where incomes grew steadily year after year but one where a man could support a family on a single paycheck, and where young children were raised at home in the loving care of their mothers rather than being dropped off at an

impersonal day care centers. Fertility rates were also much higher in the 1950s and '60s than today.

All this represents Buchanan's greatest challenge. Rather than rebelling, Americans may be resigned to a global economy that could eventually wipe out both our national sovereignty and the particularisms of the nation's regional cultures. The future of a Buchanan-style traditionalism in Jerry Springer's America is, at the least, a very troubled proposition. Still, it goes without saying that Pat Buchanan remains the most important ally the beleaguered traditionalist camp has seen in many, many years.

III.2 All Empires End in Ruin

A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny. Patrick J. Buchanan.
Washington: Regnery Gateway.

(1999)

During the 1996 presidential campaign, candidates for the Republican Party presidential nomination were asked what professions they would choose if they were not in politics. Pat Buchanan said that he would like to write history. In *A Republic, Not an Empire*, Buchanan lives up to that desire, giving a thorough reading of America's perilous journey through the world of foreign affairs.

In recent years, Buchanan has discovered the rich heritage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. His previous book, *The Great Betrayal*, claimed that all great American presidents, sooner or later, learn the virtues of trade protectionism—or, as Buchanan likes to note, there are no free traders on Mount Rushmore. In this book, Buchanan becomes the only national figure to take George Washington's dictum of "no entangling alliances" seriously. This, too, was a policy followed by every president until Woodrow Wilson's utopian notions altered the course of U.S. foreign policy.

If Washington is the lodestar, then the example of Great Britain represents a warning to current American hubris. Masters of the sea, Britain found its involvements in Europe sowed the seeds for that nation's eventual demise to second-power status. Influenced by the views of certain British historians, Buchanan seconds the notion that British war guarantees to Poland in the late 1930s sealed that empire's fate. When Hitler invaded Poland, the UK declared war on Germany. Only it was a "phony war." Britain could not act to save Poland; the UK had issued a guarantee it could not honor. More monstrous calamities followed. Buchanan suggests that a defense pact between Britain and France would have prevented Hitler from ever considering an invasion of western Europe. Instead, the German dictator would have only moved east, marching through the unfortunate Poland before, like Napoleon, meeting his end at the gates of St. Petersburg. Key to this scenario is that the United States, as its citizens then desired, would have stayed out of a much shorter World War II. As readers know by now, Buchanan has been raked over the coals for this World War II revisionism. But the war did bring down the British Empire. Since then, that

once-mighty nation has gladly surrendered its own independence, becoming a willing subject of the budding American empire.

Buchanan believes the United States is similarly overextended today, not just in eastern Europe, but also in Asia and the Middle East. Right now, the American empire seems impenetrable, invincible. No one can imagine an American defeat on the battlefield. At the same time, no empire lasts forever. Americans will pay the price of empire in dollars (i.e., tens of billions, maybe even more to patrol the Balkans). But they will not pay the price in blood, witness the immediate pullout in Somalia, following a firefight that left eighteen Americans dead.

A somewhat sympathetic reviewer in the *Wall Street Journal* sees validity in Buchanan's naysaying. The commentator-turned-presidential-candidate is playing the role of the Roman slave whose duty was to whisper "Remember, thou art mortal!" into the ears of conquering Roman war heroes. The reviewer, who is British, claims the rise of a European superstate will overtake America's current economic and military dominance. Consider also the American defense budget. Empire-building costs money. Empires also cause resentments galore. Most prominent is our expansion of NATO into eastern Europe. When the Soviets pulled out of that region, Americans and western Europeans promised Moscow there would be no NATO expansion. Russia, China, and India are now moving toward their own mutual defense pact. India and Pakistan have tested nuclear weapons. Iran may develop nuclear weapons too. If Yugoslavia had nukes, would NATO have bombed that little country day and night for seventy-six days last spring? Empires have a bad habit of making endless enemies.

A nation with a republican heritage can survive these trends, but only if its people possess a large historical memory. For the U.S., that is, at best, a dubious proposition. Buchanan is writing American history for a public that cares little about their nation's past. History is strewn with fallen empires. Since some originally made great contributions to Western culture, their demise is more painful. Rome sought to dominate the known world, only to allow its gates to be crashed, its civilization destroyed by barbarian hordes. The same boomerang effect is occurring today in Great Britain as former colonists from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean flood this sinking isle, causing, in part, secession movements in Scotland and Wales. Here at home, Bill Clinton happily awaits the day when the United States "loses its dominant European culture" while George W. Bush boasts about a Texas that "in the near future" will not have a majority ethnic group. When empires end in ruin, they often are destroyed from within. Ambivalent Americans seem destined to learn this iron rule of history the hard way.

III.3 The Shock of Recognition

The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization. Patrick J. Buchanan. New York: Thomas Dunne Books. (2002)

"I bought the book two days ago, and I'm about one third into the book. The stats and quotes are hard to dispute. What Buchanan describes is horrifying and depressing. . . . Let's hope that Mr. Buchanan's stats do not occur in the near future."

"Mark from New Jersey" in an online review of The Death of the West.

He is not the first person to address the apocalyptic subject, but it takes someone of Pat Buchanan's stature to illuminate the obvious: Western civilization is disappearing, dying under two related phenomenon: low fertility rates and massive non-Western immigration. The numbers say it all.

The Death of the West is typical Buchanan: learned, witty, angry, provocative. On nearly every page, rhetorical bombs explode. The book will shock. And shock, as the theologian Paul Tillich correctly noted, is the beginning of wisdom. Readers can breezily dismiss Buchanan's arguments or they can come to sobering realizations. Unless current trends are decisively reversed, then the time of America, at least as a cultural entity, has come and gone.

Unlike previous volumes, Buchanan doesn't dwell much on economic factors. *The Death of The West* is also different in that it holds no optimism for cultural renewal. The collapse of the West is about more than mere policy. It points to a spiritual crisis. Western man, especially European man, has no faith. Church attendance in European nations is abysmal. In Northern European cities, over half of all babies are not even baptized. Liberals like Vaclav Havel happily admit that Europeans are trying to fashion a godless culture, an "atheistic civilization." It won't work. Anti-Christian Europeans live only for themselves. Their birth rates are below the replacement level. Even more contentious is the immigration issue.

Decades of rapid moral decline have brought us to this endgame. Buchanan lists a number of Marxist intellectuals—Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs—to name just two unnotables. When Marxist economics failed to capture the working classes, its followers tried other options. Namely, they would grab the cultural institutions of Europe and America, and tear down the West's Christian foundation. Back in the 1930s, Lukacs, for instance, introduced a curriculum to Hungarian schoolchildren that promoted "free love . . . the outdatedness of monogamy, and the irrelevance of religion." It was, no doubt, the wave of the future. The historian Jacques Barzun, meanwhile, singles out World War I as the catastrophe that destroyed European civilization. What followed was the debauchery of the 1920s. The party picked up again in the 1960s, interrupted only by the Depression 1930s, another world war, and the Cold War 1950s.

Either way, the rot set in. Legalized abortion and contraceptives, along with the cult of immediate gratification have liberated Western man (and woman) from the responsibilities of adulthood. Couples, married or not, can now satisfy their animal desires without worrying about having children. Who wants kids anyway? Raising them is costly and burdensome. It involves the kind of sacrifices the professional classes don't want to make. Consider these enlightened comments from a young British girl, a twenty-something advertising executive enjoying life in the big city.

If I had a kid . . . I wouldn't be able to do half the things I take for granted. Every Saturday at 10:30 a.m., when we are still in bed, my husband and I look at each other and just say, 'Thank God we weren't up at 5 a.m. caring for a brat.' We have such a great time just the two of us; who knows if it would work if we introduced another person into the equation?

As always, the state has played its malevolent role in the unfolding tragedy. In America, Buchanan points to the courts, which for the past sixty years have been engaged in an aggressive campaign to de-Christianize America. A simple prayer at a high school football game in rural Texas sends the black-robed tyrants to the ramparts. Government schools (as libertarians correctly call them) remain on a rampage, dedicated to exterminating the American past. Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson are just a few of the heroes targeted. For the past two decades, changing demographics have been used as the rationale for the assault on the old America. If whites are not part of the future of America, how can they be part of the *history* of that nation? All you have to do is rewrite the textbooks, eliminating the achievements of whites. There is the also, as Roger McGrath maintains, the matter of male virility. If young boys learned about Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, or Audie Murphy, they might want to emulate them. The educational elites don't want *that* at all.

This leads us to the immigration question. In centuries past, various popes would call crusades to repel foreign invasions of Europe. Such crusades weren't mandatory, but Europe had enough men of faith to beat back the invaders. Today, of course, the pope commands no armies, while the secular governments in Europe and America have for decades now left their borders woefully undefended. Late as it is, European politicians are getting nervous about the prospect of a multicultural society. Across the Mediterranean, points south and east, fertility rates are higher than Europe's. But the economies of those nations, in a postcolonial era of bad leadership and bad planning, are dismal. Europe, meanwhile, used free enterprise economics to recover from the devastation of World War II. The West remains rich. The Third World stays poor. So where do the Third World multi-millions want to live? Still, only a few nations, especially Italy, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland seem committed to holding the line. A country such as Great Britain will pay great lip service to the social upheaval caused by mass immigration—and then will do nothing about it.

Andrew Lytle once predicted the day was coming when the masses would cry out and ask: what can I do to be saved? Indeed, every jeremiad needs signposts to a better world. On a practical level, there must be a strict immigration cutoff, complimented by the deportation of illegals and the reparation of the legal population. (The latter is not as controversial as it sounds. Numerous countries—Japan, Italy, Czech Republic, Belgium, France, and Great Britain—all have reparation policies on the books.) Immigration restrictions, plus deportation and reparation

are a matter of will, politicians willing to stand up to the media onslaught. On the family side, Buchanan recommends tax breaks for couples with children. (Such a policy has already had a positive effect in such nations as Russia, Ukraine, and Australia.) Economics *do* matter. With a welfare state to support, young couples groan under a tax burden unknown to previous generations, one so great that it prevents them from being able to afford more than one or two children. As far as all this is concerned, I'd look at it another way. Parents, even more than the state, should assist their beleaguered offspring. Decades of plunging wages have dramatically altered the landscape. No longer can the son hope to surpass the father. He can, at best, only hope to equal his earning power. The average parent, in today's world, has only one of two children. Once mortgage payments and college tuition are paid off, such parents have a healthy nest egg. Forget the British girl who likes sleeping in. This "I'm spending my children's inheritance" is selfish insanity, old folks style. Parents should take part of their nest egg and give it to their children, in the form, of, say, assistance with a house down payment. Then tell Junior to do his duty with two or three children. The joys of family are such that couples of faith will find a way. As the author notes, people of faith want—and receive—bountiful families.

III.4 The Last Conservative

Where the Right Went Wrong: How Neoconservatives Subverted the Reagan Revolution and Hijacked the Bush Presidency. Patrick Buchanan. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press.

(2004)

Do conservatives listen to Pat Buchanan? Not too long ago, they did. During the 1980s, he was the preeminent columnist/commentator on the Right. When, in 1985, he took a large pay cut to join the Reagan White House as Director of Communications, East Coast conservatives all applauded the move. Even Republicans on Capitol Hill supported him. After White House aides leaked damaging stories about Buchanan to the press, numerous Senate Republicans signed a letter to President Reagan urging him to crack down on the anti-Buchanan factions.

Then came the end of the Cold War. Buchanan opposed the first crisis of the new era, the Gulf War of 1991. He also began articulating his America First platform, which included protective tariffs, an end to foreign aid, the closing of American military bases abroad, and restrictions on legal immigration. By the time Buchanan challenged President Bush in the 1992 primaries, he had long been booted from the ranks of respectable conservative company.

Still, Pat Buchanan remains a romantic about the conservative movement in America—whatever that might be. He remembers the brash conservatism that defeated the Rockefeller wing of the GOP and helped Barry Goldwater win that party's nomination. Every chapter in *Where the Right Went Wrong* is a book in itself. What is Buchanan saying? Among other things, that "democratic

imperialism” will lead to endless warfare, with no good outcome possible; that neoconservatives are knee-jerk liberals (their idols being “Wilson, FDR, Dr. King”) who only care about a permanent war against the Arab world; that economic globalism, including free trade, has meant the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs overseas and a falling dollar which itself will doom the American empire; and finally, that self-government in America is over, destroyed by a tyrannical Supreme Court and timid Congress, which over the decades has been more than willing let the courts rule a once-free nation on any number of social issues: school busing, abortion, school prayer, and various homosexual “rights.” For what it’s worth, one leading neoconservative now declares that *all* conservatives must “insist” on gay marriage.

The failure to challenge the neocons has ensured the Right’s current irrelevancy. Where did the Republican Party go wrong? There were betrayals all throughout the 1970s and ’80s, especially on Supreme Court nominees. In 1994, however, conservatives were able to gain one last victory. It was a year when pro-Tenth Amendment and anti-immigration forces, along with angry social conservatives, gave Republicans their first congressional majority in forty years. But nothing came of it. Instead of ending foreign aid, abolishing affirmative action, slapping a moratorium on legal immigration, and eliminating hundreds of federal programs, Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey fought a losing battle with Bill Clinton over Medicare reform. Clinton badly demagogued the issue, but Republicans, once again, completely ignored those Middle America folk who had supplied the shock troops on election day.

Despite that betrayal—and a second smear campaign waged against his own 1996 presidential run—Buchanan, after a disappointing third party run in 2000, is now back in the GOP. Again, is anyone listening? Granted, Republicans have produced their share of populists throughout the years, but for the most part, that party has been about the marriage of big business and big government. However, the key, as Buchanan notes, is that the nature of big business has changed dramatically. Once economic nationalists, captains of industry are now ideological globalists. In their endless search for cheap labor, they demand free trade (so as to move their plants to Indonesia or China) and open borders (so that whatever jobs America has goes to Third World immigrants willing to work for Third World wages). Needing campaign funds, Republicans duly comply.

There have been consequences in the heartland. From 1968 to 1988, the GOP nominees for president received, on average, fifty-three percent of the popular vote. From 1992 to 2000, that number dropped to forty-two percent.

Reading the book and reflecting on Buchanan’s many broadsides, one wonders if success was ever possible for a post-World War II conservatism. After all, by the 1950s, the New Deal (thanks to the war itself) stood triumphant. A judicial tyranny was being born. The last resistance to a centralized regime—that caucus of conservative Southern Democrats—was scheduled for obliteration. The right’s only hope was the survival issue: Taking an unflinching, unceasing

stand for a Western, Christian civilization. That would have meant opposition to communism, but also immigration, abortion, multiculturalism, and a totalitarian political correctness; in short, the Left's sweeping attempts to de-Christianize the entire country. Such a stand could have made for an impressive cultural movement, with even some political success. We may never know.

A devout Christian, Pat Buchanan does not give into despair. But as far as "getting our country back" is concerned, there's not much time left either.

III.5 America Used to Be Your County

State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America. Patrick J. Buchanan. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press.

(2006)

Alexandria, Virginia, as all sons of the South know, is the hometown of Robert E. Lee. Even while living in exile in Lexington, Lee held fond memories of his boyhood home. "There is no community," he remarked in the final years of his life, "to which my affections more strongly cling than that of Alexandria, composed of my earliest and oldest friends, my kind school-fellow, and faithful teachers."

How goes Alexandria today? Consider this passage from Pat Buchanan's latest stemwinder.

"Man down on Edsall Road!" came the night call to paramedic Lieutenant Jason Jenkins. Jenkins described what he found at the scene as "the most inhumane act of violence I've ever seen." The sixteen-year-old was lying on his back holding up his mutilated hands. The fingers had been severed by a machete.

The May 2004 attack occurred in Alexandria, Virginia. The victim was a member of the South Side Locos, second largest gang in northern Virginia, with 1,500 members. His attackers belonged to *Mara Salvatrucha*, MS-13, the largest and most violent gang in northern Virginia, with 3,500 members, whose savagery . . . rivals the Mafia in its heyday. But unlike MS-13, the Mafia never had 6,000 members in the Washington area.

Behold Alexandria: From Robert E. Lee to violent Latin American street gangs. Today, Alexandria; tomorrow, America. In fact, it's already happened.

State of Emergency is the sequel to Buchanan's runaway 2002 best seller, *The Death of the West*. This book focuses more heavily on the immigration issue rather than the birth dearth crisis. Other than offering generous tax breaks to couples with more than one child, there isn't much that can be done about low birth rates. Something, however, can be done about immigration. Legislative bodies, in Europe and America, can do what the U.S. Congress did in 1924. They can simply vote to cut off the flow of *legal* immigration.

Well, they had better. The United States has long been subjected to the successful Mexican conquest of the Southwest. Western Europe, too, has been victimized by that same invasion, this one from North Africa and all points south and east. From Berlin to Amsterdam, Paris to London; from New York to Miami, Houston to Los Angeles, Western civilization is disappearing from the face of the Earth.

How did it happen? Buchanan cites the suicidal European wars of the twentieth century. The Germanic invasions of Rome brought down that once mighty empire, but it did not end Western civilization. Out of the rubble, first came the rise of Christianity, the glories of the Middle Ages, plus the “explorers, missionaries . . . conquerors, [and] colonizers.” The European Age had begun, and for the next 500 years, the West “wrote the history of the world.” Then came World Wars I and II—the “Civil War of Western Civilization.” Most damaging was the encounter with Adolf Hitler’s racial theories. The shaken, war-weary West has never recovered. Guilt-ridden now over the old imperialism, such cowardice extended to immigration policies. From the late 1940s onward, the West practiced decolonization abroad but more significantly surrender at home. One nation after another—the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden—could not say no to the flood tide pouring into the prosperous West from the newly freed but also impoverished, oppressed, and failed nations of the Third World.

From the beginning, there were warnings from an array of statesmen and authors: Enoch Powell, the novelist Jean Raspail, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Umberto Bossi, and Buchanan himself. These men and others argued that mass immigration would mark the West’s final collapse. Some folks have listened, but not enough to prevail. As always, there are Buchanan’s broadsides against Big Business. In one key chapter, “The Roots of Paralysis?” Buchanan blasts his fellow Republicans for listening more to corporate American than their rank-and-file voters. (In 1993, for instance, a survey of grassroots Republicans found that eighty percent of respondents wanted steep reductions in legal immigration.)

But there are other factors than lust for cheap labor and guilt trips by the political elites. In both Europe and America, there is the continuing strength of modern liberalism. As Paul Gottfried notes, European-style socialism, by the 1980s, had lost its appeal to working-class voters. And so, leftists began to view Third World immigrants—and their habit of living on public assistance—as just the right people to fill the void. Leftists could also offer immigrants affirmative action and multiculturalism as a way to sweeten the pot. In Europe, opponents of mass immigration are routinely smeared as fascists—and worse. One anti-immigration party, Vlaams Blok in Belgium, has been outlawed for promoting “racism.” It all goes back to World War II. The encounter with National Socialism gave liberals a huge stick to plunder their foes. There is, as Buchanan claimed in *The Death of the West*, an “intimidated majority” in the United States. True enough, but it’s not made up of liberals.

When it comes to immigration, there are, I'll claim, four types of Americans. The first, a small minority, opposes all large-scale immigration, both legal and illegal. These people are activists who join such lobbying organizations as Federation for Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Carrying Capacity Network (CCN), and Numbers USA, among others. They also pester their lawmakers into taking the right position. On the Left are the legion of feminists, mostly young women from well-heeled suburbs. Such ladies are not interested in hearing about white decline or whites becoming a minority group. Their resentment is towards the current power structure. In other words, when will it be *our* turn to run things? Thirdly, I'd list regular liberals, a group that overlaps with the feminists. As with European leftists, they support Third World immigration because such people will vote overwhelmingly Democratic. Through this demographic revolution, liberals will exact their revenge on the red-state folks in Middle America. Finally, there is that majority of Americans who dislike immigration. It is, however, an ambivalent majority. Immigration at best, is a nuisance. When it takes over their towns and neighborhoods, the natives will pack their bags and move elsewhere. In fact, most Americans believe that illegal immigration is greater in numbers than the legal variety, when, in fact, the opposite is true.

It is not enough to read *State of Emergency* and then fling it across the room in despair. It's not the author's intent. Instead, read it and take *action*. Join one of the organizations mentioned earlier. Rep. Tom Tancredo's Immigration Reform Caucus (IRC) now has over 100 members. If there is hope, this is where it lies. Make sure your congressman is a member. Do the same for every congressman in your state, your region, in the Republican Party. If those numbers swell by several dozen, then the Tancredo/Buchanan platform of a moratorium, secure borders, and illegal alien deportation could triumph in the House, eventually forcing the Senate to act, also. The hour is late, much later, than the American people care to believe.

III.6 Should Britain Have Stayed Home?

Churchill, Hitler and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and The West Lost the World. Patrick J. Buchanan. New York: Crown.

(2008)

The wars of peoples are more terrible than those of kings.

—Winston Churchill, 1901

With *Churchill, Hitler and "The Unnecessary War,"* Pat Buchanan gives a whole new meaning to the term "the Thankless Persuasion," one that was used to describe those maverick conservatives of the 1950s. Buchanan, in this book, dons the role of a British historian, as his footnotes turn up such British scholars as

A.J.P. Taylor and B.H. Liddell Hart. American revisionism on World War II centers around Franklin D. Roosevelt and the back door to war, that is, promising voters he'd stay out of the European conflict while slapping an oil embargo on Japan. Here, Buchanan focuses on British foreign policy. Buchanan is America's preeminent prophet of an America First platform and so he examines Britain's splendid isolationism of yore: were the Brits right to junk it in the momentous days of August 1914? Was losing their empire inevitable? Buchanan has been a severe critic of NATO expansion and the numerous defense commitments the U.S. has doled out over the past six decades. Similarly, he focuses on three such British guarantees, ones made to Belgium in 1839, to France in 1906, and—where most sparks will fly—to Poland in 1939. The thankless persuasion comes with criticizing Britain's abandonment of splendid isolationism, claiming that proper British policy would have significantly shortened World War I, and with that a failure, could have prevented World War II outright.

Pat Buchanan's books are denounced with equal vigor on both the Right and the Left. They are also best sellers. Easy to see why. His writing style—that combination of Ernest Hemingway and T.S. Eliot: short, declarative sentences, written in a dramatic style—grabs the reader from the start, never letting go over the course of hundreds of pages. Reading a Buchanan book is always an intense experience. The reader knows something profound is happening, namely the passing of the greatest civilization man has ever known. Most chapters in *"An Unnecessary War"* could be a potential book in themselves. Most memorable are the two chapters on World War I and the one critical of the entire Churchill legacy. In those chapters, the reader relives the fateful plunge into war. Yes, a 4,000-year-old civilization *did* die in August 1914. At best, only a remnant of it will survive the twenty-first century. The fierce enmity felt by the winning side, especially the French, towards the vanquished Germans only heightened the tragedy. There was no joy in the Allied victory, only calls for vengeance. Winston Churchill, as we shall see, is not a major player in the three fateful decisions of modern British history. Still, his blunders were monumental: The appeasement of Joe Stalin (whose Bolshevism he had once vigorously denounced), the acquiescence to American bullying, the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo, and, earlier, in World War I, his naval blockade of Germany, one that caused upwards of 750,000 deaths of German civilians. War fever, as Justin Raimondo has observed, does addle the brain.

"An Unnecessary War" is three books in one: studies of World Wars I and II and of their consequence, the ongoing collapse of Western civilization. In his long career, Buchanan has excelled as a pundit, a television and radio personality, a presidential aide and speechwriter, and as a politician, the ability to win New Hampshire presidential primaries. But he truly enjoys the study of history with all of its strange and wild turns. The book has sixty-two pages of footnotes. No detail in the Tragic Era from 1914–1945 escapes his attention. And so, the reader must endure those missed opportunities to prevent war. How they sting! Take the longtime Anglo-Japanese treaty. What was wrong with it? The pact kept Japan

in the Western orbit. It also kept the peace in the vast Asian-Pacific region. After World War I, however, a conflict Americans reluctantly joined, the U.S. wanted the treaty scraped, replaced with an American-Anglo pact, which was just a conference, something with no teeth in it. Which is what happened. Japan, in turn, became isolated, surly, and militaristic. Pearl Harbor was around the bend.

Or take the ill-fated Stresa Front. By the mid-1930s, Benito Mussolini was disgusted with Hitler, who he now blamed for the assassination of an Austrian prime minister. Consequently, a British-Italian-French alliance was set up to keep Hitler in a box. Knowing this, Hitler, in 1935, proposed a German-British naval pact, which London consented to. Further, when Italy invaded Abyssinia also in 1935, the Brits, a moral people, reacted in high dudgeon. Their government quickly imposed economic sanctions on Rome. A few observers dryly noted that Britain had indulged in its own African imperialism over the decades. No matter. The Stresa Front was now broken. In 1940, Mussolini, sensing that Hitler held a winning hand, joined an alliance with Berlin.

Finally, consider the sad fate of the noble German democrats of the 1920s. During that decade, those democrats pleaded with the West for some diplomatic victories. A free-trade deal with Austria was floated, as was an Austro-German customs union. Both were rejected, especially by the French, still resentful over the enormous losses (two million men, the flower of French manhood lost) they had suffered in the recent past. Paris also wanted to keep the German-speaking peoples divided. Still, the West was warned: we German democrats need victories; if not, a dictatorship is around the corner.

Since the book is about the passing of the West, Buchanan takes us back to the beginning. As the new century dawned, Britain ruled the waves and with it, the world. There was some nipping at the heels of empire, in Venezuela and South Africa. And so Britain sought alliances: First, from the U.S., which said yes, and then from Germany, which turned down a naval pact. Worried about rising German sea power, London then went to France, which agreed to a loose alliance. Unbeknownst to the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, the foreign minister, Edward Grey, had, in 1906, made an even stronger treaty, a war guarantee with Paris in case of a German invasion of that country. In August 1914, the bills came due. Germany invaded Belgium. That act was wrong, but it presented no threat to Britain. Still, the British mobs screamed for war. Americans care little for World War I revisionism. But if Buchanan is right about the Great War, then he is right about everything. (If the Brits don't enter, then the Yanks stay out. The war ends early with a modest German victory. No massive French casualties. No Versailles, no Lenin, Stalin, or Hitler. As a British reviewer observed, Buchanan's hindsight is sometimes too easy. But the book is about larger concerns.)

The war and its aftermath—the ill-fated Versailles Treaty—represent also a brief against democracy, not to mention a case for a long-lost monarchy. The mobs called first for war and then for vengeance. The politicians, now at the mercy of the people, had no choice but to heed the wishes of a mob. War will always be with us. In the past, however, the winning monarch would invite the

losing sovereign to the table. A just peace was sought by all. Not so at Versailles, following this war of the democracies. Millions of German-speaking peoples saw themselves jackknifed out of their homeland, into strange countries. Most prominent was Danzig, a city of up to 450,000 mostly German-speaking peoples, now Gdańsk, a port city in Poland. This is where the drama of 1939 took place.

Even though Churchill's name graces the title of this book, the focus, as in most histories of the 1930s, is on Neville Chamberlain. Buchanan mostly exonerates Chamberlain on the Munich appeasement, but scolds him—and his foreign minister, Lord Halifax—over the Poland war guarantee. Chamberlain, of course, remains notorious for the Munich pact. But what could he do? In 1936, Britain had no divisions at all in Europe, while Germany had seventy-six divisions on the ground. Britain was in no position to confront Germany; plus, the British government saw certain German grievances as legitimate. Chamberlain's mistake? After Munich he should have called for rearmament, a variation of Ronald Reagan's "trust but verify" stand towards Mikhail Gorbachev. Instead, Chamberlain announced a peace in our time. In Poland, meanwhile, nothing went right. The war guarantee only hardened the Polish position, that is, no compromise on Danzig. Plus, Warsaw had its own multiethnic headaches: If Danzig was lost, would not the Balts, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups seek independence? Again, the Brits had no means to defend Poland. They issued a war guarantee and then left Poland naked to a German attack. Why? Well, there were political pressures on the Chamberlain government. The British leadership could not bear another bloodless coup. Better, some thought, to see Poland lost through a military invasion. Buchanan clearly would have liked to see a compromise, but he does admire the Poles for standing their ground and fighting for their homeland.

And so, the great question: what to do about Poland? Buchanan, inspired by a personal note received from George Keenan following the publication of *A Republic, Not an Empire*, is characteristically blunt. London should have told Warsaw: we couldn't save the Czechs and we can't save you. Maybe then the Poles would have negotiated on Danzig. Chamberlain, at the same time, should have told his people: it's time to rearm. But that wasn't in his nature. The point was to keep Hitler out of France, out of the Low Countries, out of Britain itself. Plus, a deal on Danzig, which would prevent Hitler from moving east, which was always his plan.

To the answer to the title of this review: Yes, Britain should have stayed out of a war (World War I) where it had no enemy in Germany. In the 1930s, however, a British military presence in Europe, in the form of the Stresa Front, was sound policy. No isolationism here. A rearmed Britain keeps Hitler at bay. The British Empire remains intact. And America—as in Buchanan's fondest hopes—remains happily isolationist. Peace through strength would have worked, just like it did during the Cold War.

This book is not about democracy or the Four Freedoms that Roosevelt and Churchill enunciated as the war went on. Instead, it is a eulogy for the passing of

a great empire. Yes, even without the wars, it would have ended eventually—but on London's terms, not Washington's or the rabble at the United Nations. Only consider this scene concerning a vengeful America's determination to exact a price for bailing out the Brits for the second time in a matter of decades.

The twentieth century was not the British Century. It was the American Century. Churchill believed the two English-speaking peoples would be eternal partners, with British statesmen playing Greeks to America's Romans. But when Britain was in her darkest hour, FDR shook her down for every dime. Pouring over a list of British assets in the Western Hemisphere that Henry Morgenthau had requested, Roosevelt "reacted with the coolness of a WASP patrician: 'Well, they aren't bust—there's lots of money there.'" . . . Before Lend-Lease could begin, Britain was forced to sell all her commercial assets to the United States and turn over all her gold. FDR sent his own ship, the *Quincy*, to Simonstown near Cape Town to pick up the last \$50 million in British gold reserves.

The British Empire, unlike those of Tokyo and Moscow, had its humanities, even though it was guilty of all the petty violence that is the business of empire. Buchanan clearly mourns its passing, agreeing with the poet Robinson Jeffers that the Brits, unlike Americans, were natural rulers. Buchanan's nostalgia is for the days when the West wrote his own history, when the multiculturalists weren't in the saddle, dragging Western man to the bar with accusations of imperialism, racism, segregation, apartheidism. There are also practical results. From that well spring of British culture gushed forth the prosperity and stability that once existed in North America (the United States and Canada), Asia-Pacific (Australia, New Zealand), not to mention similar progress in Singapore, Hong Kong, and India, plus a degree of civil order on the African continent. Life expectancy in the colonies increased markedly under British rule and the accompanying Western technology. An empire's legacy was hospitals, schools, and railroad travel where before none had existed. "When we spit on imperialism, we're spitting on our own legacy," Buchanan told a reporter back in 1986, when the former supported a vigorous internationalism to combat Soviet adventurism. But it was also Great Britain that was on Buchanan's mind. This book will make you mourn the sudden end of the British Empire, and with it the disappearance possibly of Great Britain itself.

Which leads us to the book's third theme. "All around us, we see the passing of the West," declares Buchanan on the book's first page. Who can deny it? Since 1945, not only have the great empires of Europe fallen, but nations created by Europeans—Rhodesia, South Africa, the United States, Great Britain—have been, or are being, lost to those same people. The same looks to be true in France and Canada. I will regress to briefly explain the *whys* of Third World immigration into the West. It all goes back to 1945. There was, first, the boomerang effect: empires fall, their subject peoples fleeing to the "mother country," be it

France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands. There were also Cold War considerations. After the war, Asian diplomats reiterated an old demand, one first made after World War I: you must let our people into your countries (i.e., Britain, the U.S.). Fearing such nations might embrace the new enemy in Moscow, Western diplomats caved in. Mostly, immigration is about power politics. Beginning in the 1970s, the Left's socialist policies had begun to grate on middle-class voters. Hence, the rise of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, and Brian Mulroney. The Left's response was to replace the white vote with countless millions of Third World aliens who now promised with affirmative action, multiculturalism, and welfare payments, could be trusted to vote the leftist line. And conservatives? Knowing full well they would be savaged by the media as racists, they refused to stem the tide. Yes, it all goes back to 1945 and the encounter with National Socialism. World War II, in a most perverse way, was the best thing to ever happen to liberalism. Any Western politician who seeks immigration restrictions is now a walking brownshirt.

Finally, a word on Pat Buchanan, Buchananism, and its prospects. First, Pat Buchanan is a man of the West. From his autobiography, we learn that Buchanan, in his college days, read the classic authors of the Anglo-American world: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Robert Browning, plus Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Whitman, Stephen Crane, Twain, Dreiser, Jack London, T.S. Eliot, and Hemingway. While at Georgetown, he learned Latin, the founding language of Western civilization. His books are infused with a thorough knowledge of American and Western history. His career has been devoted to the triumph of a Western, Christian civilization, which puts him on the outs even in the company of conservatives. The United States has become a nation whose culture is full of resentment for centuries of Western achievement. Not everyone has been intimidated, but whether their numbers are large enough is the great question.

In Europe, the situation is different. Since the publication of Buchanan's masterpiece, *The Death of the West*, psychic airwaves seem to have been released on the continent. There is a discussion of low fertility and how to improve upon it. In Russia and the Ukraine, for instance, tax breaks for young mothers who bear more than one child have increased fertility in those key Eastern European nations. Fertility rates have seen an uptick in Ireland, Poland, Iceland, Norway, France, and even long-sterile Italy, the latter due mostly to a drop in the abortion rate. Unlike America, Europe is home to numerous anti-immigration third parties. Such parties have seen power-sharing success in Austria, Italy, and Denmark, while being ostracized in Belgium, France, and Britain. A battle has been joined, its outcome far from certain. In *The Death of the West*, Buchanan declared Europe to be both the birthplace and death place of Western civilization. Will even a portion of the West make it? On the continent, at least, there is an awareness of the monumental stakes at play.

PART IV

Samuel T. Francis



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IV.1 Goodbye, Middle America

Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism. Samuel Francis. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

(1993)

No doubt conservatives in Washington and Manhattan will not accept the thesis of this important study; namely, that their cause is defunct and its entire existence a failure. If they're not buying, then they should look around them to see a pair of 1960s radicals running the country, not to mention liberal domination of the courts, the media, academia, public schools, and every other facet of American life. It would be pusillanimous to blame it all on George H. W. Bush.

In Samuel Francis's view, the post-World War II Right was doomed to fail from the beginning. In the 1950s, William Buckley's *National Review* became the arbitrator of conservative thought, but this new movement often sought out the wrong allies. When the young Buckley, now famous as the author of *God and Man at Yale*, began sounding out support for a conservative weekly he was urged to seek support from Middle America for the cause. Henry Regnery, the intrepid publisher who brought out *God and Man*, advised him strongly to avoid having a conservative publication headquartered in New York City. It didn't happen. The magazine would be published in New York. Buckley, according to colleagues, was determined to shun "the cliché ridden grassroots" and try instead to win over the New Deal intellectuals who had midwived the revolution of American socialism—a dubious proposal as best. The New Dealers had no intention of changing course and would only welcome conservatives if the Right accepted the "cultural apparatus" of a reigning liberalism. That some of them would do.

The Vietnam War, claims Francis, is where the Right went wrong. Vietnam was a liberal's war, American involvement the brainchild of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. It was about more than fighting communism. The Great Society types also wanted to bring liberalism to that far-off country, with such projects as a TVA on the Mekong Delta. When things went bad, the New Left began attacking not just the war, but, as Francis notes, the entire liberal power centers of the New Deal itself. The Right's response was not to oppose the war and adopt a more sensible version of the New Left's populist tone (New Left tactics did offend Middle America's sensibilities). Instead they attacked the New Left. By doing so, however, the Buckleyites were now defending a liberal's war and with it, liberalism itself. Conservative support for Vietnam mattered; it mattered tremendously. War means big government, and Vietnam was no different. In the mid-1960s, LBJ had to raise taxes to support the failing war effort. Instead of opposing the war, as the traditionalist Russell Kirk did, the Right now found themselves as apologists for the welfare-warfare state.

Conservatives would also find themselves in alliance with pro-war liberals now disgusted with New Left antics. These liberals, soon to be called neo-conservatives, were welcomed into the conservative camp. This move might

have been acceptable if it were only to fight communism. Neoconservatism was anticommunist, but it was also dedicated to “defending the liberal managerial system, foreign and domestic . . . which it never had the slightest interest in dismantling.” Once again, Buckley attempted to align respectable conservatism with a northeastern elite, while continuing to ignore his natural allies in Middle America.

There is plenty of blame to go around. Francis faults all the different factions of conservatism for failing to mobilize potential middle-class and blue-collar armies. Old Right intellectuals dwelled on “philosophical esoterica” and an “abstract and rootless intellectualism” that could not communicate to the middle class. The New Right, after scoring exceptional successes in the 1980 elections, followed Ronald Reagan to Washington and soon became caught up in meaningless turf wars and horse-trading with the Republican establishment, also alienating themselves from the coalition that put them in power. Conservatives built no permanent organizations in Middle America, ones that might be strong enough to influence squeamish politicians. But in essay after essay, Francis reserves most the blame for the neoconservative wing of the movement. Neoconservatives, once they became the Right’s dominant faction, sought to transform conservatism into a mirror image of a 1950s and ’60s-style liberalism that they still admired.

Unlike the Old Right, the neoconservatives were in agreement with the economic and cultural dynamics that transformed America in the early decades of the twentieth century. The triumph of the New Deal soon evolved into rule by the new managerial elite or New Class. The managerial elite involved an alliance between the welfare state, the new bureaucracies, big business, corporations, industrialists, academia, labor unions, churches, and the mass media, all of which resulted in a successful attempt to control both the economic and cultural life of the nation. It was the dawning of the triumphant Leviathan state that such traditionalists as Donald Davidson spent a lifetime manfully fighting against.

To the managerial elite, the values of small-town America, plus its “tough conservatism,” posed an obstacle to their planned domination. Such Americans wanted an economic life free of government control and a culture that built around the ancient pieties of God, family, and country. The managerial elite was urban, secular, and internationalist. Conservative America was often rural, religious, and inward-looking. They were—and remain—opposed to such globalist schemes as foreign aid, free trade, and the borderless world that the *Wall Street Journal* types demand. The job of the Old Right was to ensure the survival of Middle American values by dismantling the welfare state of the managerial elites. However, neoconservatives wanted to join, not fight, the managerial class. Plus, their response to the nation’s growing social ills was to promote “bourgeois values” in that same elite. As their power grew, neoconservatives dismissed any full-scale war against the welfare state as reactionary and unrealistic.

Neoconservatism, thus, had no quarrel with New Deal–style liberalism. In the early 1970s, *National Review* stalwart James Burnham famously warned his allies that even though neoconservatives had repudiated the New Left, they retained “the emotional gestalt of liberalism, the liberal sensitivity and temperament.” The Old Right, born as the loyal opposition to the New Deal, now saw its East Coast wing assimilated into a movement that championed an imperial presidency, the welfare state, and the idea of American culture not as unique or exclusive, but as representing the world’s first universal nation.

Thus the differences between the neoconservatives and an unreconstructed Old Right were about more than policy prescription. Their differences, just as those between the managerial elite and Middle America, were cultural as well. The two factions also had differing interpretations of American history. The Old Right had a concrete view of history (i.e., America was forged on the battlefields of Virginia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and the Carolinas, plus the debating halls of Philadelphia, circa 1787). The Old Right also saw the nation exclusively as a republic, rather than a mass democracy. Neoconservatives held a more abstract vision for the country. There is America as a nation for all the world’s people. Plus, neoconservatives saw the nation’s foreign policy mission as spreading democracy, through various means, to all parts of the world. In *The Conservative Movement*, Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming illustrate Francis’s point more clearly:

[Traditionalists] live almost everywhere but New York, while neoconservatives are at home almost nowhere else. From the perspective of the [neoconservative] urban northeast, America is a society of immigrants held together by an ideology of democratic capitalism, but from the perspective of the [Old Right] South and nonurban Midwest, one is most impressed by the historical saga of flesh-and-blood men and women building, generation by generation, a community on the frontier. The Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and democratic capitalism would be viewed merely as artifacts of the American experience: they were made by Americans; they did not make America.

Then there is the dark side of neoconservatism. Once they secured their preeminence, neoconservatives persisted in various smear campaigns against those who might challenge their hegemony. The campaign against M. E. Bradford during the latter’s bid for the chairmanship of the National Endowment for Humanities is cited throughout the book, as are campaigns against Old Right columnists Joe Sobran and Patrick Buchanan. In both 1992 and 1996, Buchanan’s presidential campaigns were slaughtered by countless charges of racism and fascism by numerous pundits on not just the Left, but from the conservative mainstream itself. The author himself has been a victim of political correctness on the Right.¹

Unlike the days when the libertarian and traditionalist wings of the Old Right conducted lively but civil disagreements, neoconservatives, Francis charges,

mostly refuse to confront their Old Right counterparts in serious debate. Neo-conservative seminars are noticeable for their exclusion of Old Right intellectuals. The only recent get-together between the two factions was a gathering of the Philadelphia Society, one organized by Bradford in 1986. There, Francis writes, neoconservatives complained in private of the alleged racism and extremism of the Old Right. “[The] mind-set of the neos to the paleos is pretty much the same as that of liberals . . . toward conservatives,” he observes. “The neos seem to think the paleos are ‘the stupid party,’ if not actually dangerous.”

The book is about more than the neoconservative triumph in the right wing wars. There are consequences of the Right’s loss of nerve and its acceptance of liberal premises. Once in power, conservatives became, as Robert Whittaker loves to put it, “respectable.” Now ensconced in the leftist capital, existing under the glare of a hostile media, conservatives failed to confront and replace the liberal elite with a new Middle America regime that would return the nation, as much as possible, to its republican roots. Francis is the only conservative I know who is not so partisan as to dismiss Kevin Phillips’s critique of the 1980s. Far from getting government off our backs, the size and power of the federal government exploded in the Reagan/Bush era, leaving the middle class with less disposable income, less leisure time, and a greater struggle in meeting mortgage and tuition payments. Beyond that, the Left was able to continue its march through the institutions, mopping up victory after victory in the culture wars. The establishment of Martin Luther King holiday in 1983 was the forerunner, Francis argues, to the current anti-Western fanaticism of multiculturalism and political correctness, both of which took hold in the 1990s. For those conservatives who are ambivalent about the culture war raging in the South, Francis reminds them that while today the call is for banning the Confederate flag and the playing of “Dixie,” tomorrow the multiculturalist’s venom will be directed against Washington, Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln too. Observing the wreckage done to American culture in the 1980s, Francis laments that “the defeat of the Old Right and its causes would not perhaps be so dispiriting were it not that the Right of the 1980s itself often supported, declined to oppose, or agreed to compromises with these forces of revolution.”²

Also, beyond the book’s main thesis, Francis issues a call to arms to his Middle America allies. The mission of conservatism is the same as it was when Ronald Reagan took office in 1981. Their constituencies, the Middle America Radicals, are still a force in American politics. The goal of conservatism is still the “localization, privatization and decentralization of the managerial apparatus of power, a devolution to more modest-scale organization units; and a reorientation of federal rewards from mass-scale units and hierarchies to smaller and more local ones.”

Francis is also the author of a monograph on the before-mentioned James Burnham. While he respects Old Right intellectuals, Francis believes their rejection of modernism was not at all useful in creating an opposition to liberalism. Burnham’s ideas are offered as examples of how the culture war might

still be won. From Burnham we can learn that “the limitless human appetite for power” is the only true nature of man. Burnham did not reject modernism. It was the way of the world. He sought engagement with, and victory over, liberalism. To deal with man’s evil instincts, he reminded us that “only power restrains power.” What conservatives can learn from Burnham is that their goal is not accommodation with the Left (neoconservatism) nor a retreat from modernity (the Old Right), but instead a counterrevolution that will topple liberals on both the cultural and political front. Burnham agreed with Willmore Kendall that only a patriotic army of common-sense Middle Americans could defeat the “radical and basically un-American establishment.” There was no talk from either gentleman of winning over the hearts and minds of the Washington/Manhattan elite.

In short, conservatives will succeed only when their culture once again becomes dominant in the lives of their schools, churches, communities, educational institutions, not to mention their local, state, and national capitols, namely in the form of a worthwhile political party. Modern conservatism, by only trying to conserve what they saw as the kinder, gentler side of liberalism, never even attempted such a counterrevolution. Hence, the book’s title. While it is impossible to return to the old republic, there is still a chance to regain some of our federalist roots. But it is up to the rest of us to show just a few of those same republican virtues our ancestors maintained. We are in a battle for the survival of our nation and our culture. Anything less than a counterrevolution won’t do.

IV.2 “Conserve,” Hell!

Revolution From the Middle. Samuel Francis. Raleigh, NC: Middle American Press.

(1997)

The word *revolution* has been tossed around so carelessly by Washington conservatives over the past twenty years that it has entirely lost its meaning, at least in the context of American politics. First, there was the Reagan Revolution, which was to halt the growth of government but instead saw the creation of new federal bureaucracies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs. More recently, a “revolutionary” Gingrich Congress seems ready to give President Clinton, as part of an historic budget deal, nearly all the spending increases he wants. Fortunately, Samuel Francis is here to explain that revolutions are not about balancing the budget, but rather are cultural in nature. Or as he writes:

The first thing we have to learn about fighting a culture war is that we are not fighting to “conserve” something; we are fighting to overthrow something. . . . [We] must understand clearly and firmly that the dominant authorities in the United States—in the federal government and often in state and local government as well, in the two major political parties, in

big business, the major foundations, the media, the schools, the universities, and most of the system of organized culture, including the arts and entertainment—not only do nothing to conserve . . . our traditional way of life but actually seek its destruction or are indifferent to its survival. If our culture is going to be conserved, then, we need to dethrone the dominant authorities that threaten it.

Such revolutions of course, take place through democratic means. And in recent years, the South has seen numerous traditionalist-leaning organizations—among them the Southern League, the John Randolph Club, the Southern Heritage Association, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and Daughters of the Confederacy—either being formed or enjoying dramatic increases in their membership rolls. Across the country, pro-term limits, anti-illegal immigration, anti-affirmative action groups and initiatives have further rocked the Washington political elite. But these actions are only the first shots in a long battle.

Essays collected here enunciate themes familiar to readers of Sam Francis's syndicated column: immigration, policies of the corporate elite, global trade, foreign interventionism, and the culture wars. In the 1990s, several politicians stepped forth to claim the populist mantle. But for Francis, only Pat Buchanan has successfully combined the "strange synthesis of right and left that characterizes the political beliefs of MARS (Middle American Radicals)—their combination of culturally conservative moral and social beliefs with support for economically liberal policies such as Medicare, Social Security, unemployment benefits, and economic nationalism and protectionism."

While Buchanan's 1996 campaign was victimized by a vicious media attack, the commentator's weakness, according to Francis, has been his desire to remain in a Republican Party dominated by neoconservatives and corporate elites bent on maintaining the globalist status quo. To the Republican-neocon elite, Buchanan poses a far greater threat to their hegemony than anything Bill Clinton or Al Gore may represent. Hence, the hysterical and concentrated media campaign against Buchanan after his victory in the 1996 New Hampshire presidential primary.

Perhaps Francis is correct about Buchanan's political prospects. Still, party building is a difficult, time-consuming process. Hundreds of millions of dollars would have to be raised for any new party to capture the attention of a cynical public. Still, only Buchanan possesses the personality and worldview to create a whole new politics in America. It also may be dawning on Buchanan that despite his loyal services for three Republican presidents, he will never be welcomed into the party of his youth.

In the meantime, grassroots activism will have to go forward. Organizations such as the Southern Heritage Association and Sons of Confederate Veterans have, on several occasions now, won dramatic victories in Confederate battle flag fights in both South Carolina and Georgia. These and similar movements

will have to influence lawmakers on other issues as well: immigration, affirmative action, and rolling back judicial tyranny. There is also this splendid volume, which will surely radicalize anyone who believes *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Times*, and *The Weekly Standard* all represent acceptable conservative thinking. Buy a copy for yourself, but order some for friends and relatives too.

IV.3 While America Sleeps

America Extinguished: Mass Immigration and the Disintegration of American Culture. Samuel T. Francis. Monterey, VA: Americans for Immigration Control.

(2002)

Ten years ago, it appeared that immigration restrictionists were poised to win some real political victories. In 1992, Pat Buchanan had raised the previously taboo issue in his presidential primary challenge to George H.W. Bush. That same year, *National Review*, under the editorship of John O'Sullivan, joined *Chronicles* in calling for deep cuts in legal immigration. Two years later, California voters ignored their media betters and voted overwhelmingly for Proposition 187, the ballot initiative that would deny certain welfare benefits to illegal aliens. Bills restricting immigration had the support of numerous members of Congress.

By the summer of 1996, all that momentum had collapsed. After Buchanan shocked the political world by winning the New Hampshire primary, he was savaged by the Left/Right media with a tidal wave of hate-filled rhetoric unseen before in American history. Congressional attempts to make mild cuts in legal immigration were defeated when seventy-seven Republicans voted with open-border Democrats. In time, O'Sullivan would be fired from *National Review* and the author of this collection would lose his regular column at *The Washington Times*. Finally, in 1999, federal courts had ruled Prop 187 as unconstitutional, a decision that faced no opposition from California's governing class.

Sam Francis's collection of columns on immigration reflects this gloomy situation. His 1997 essay collection, *Revolution from the Middle*, allowed for some optimism that a Middle America-based populist movement might succeed. That volume had a blue cover with a flickering light in the center. The artwork for *America Extinguished*, on the other hand, shows a lighted American flag candle in the process of a steady meltdown.

Francis hasn't been the only pundit to confront the immigration issue. However, no other columnist has written so relentlessly or courageously on the subject. The fifty-nine columns collected here attack mass immigration on economic, political, and cultural grounds. Large-scale immigration floods the labor pool, driving down wages. Pro-immigration conservatives, usually in the employ of big business, complain about a labor shortage, especially in the area of computer software-related jobs. In fact, no such shortage exists. Less immigration would mean higher wages for American workers. In addition, there would be nine million fewer poor people in the United States had massive immigration been halted three decades ago.

Concerning politics, immigration has helped to create the now-infamous red-zone, blue-zone divide, itself the greatest such division the nation has seen since the 1850s. Red-zone country is the traditional America ranging from West Virginia to Nevada, a nation far more conservative than the first-generation Texan it voted for in 2000. Much of blue-zone America (the East and West Coasts, urban centers in the Midwest), has long been liberal; nowadays, it is, among other things, as much Spanish-speaking as English-speaking, in all a place that seethes with resentment towards the heritage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. The Republicans' incessant pandering to the Hispanic vote, detailed here in several fine columns, has only moved the GOP further to the left, allowing them to accept the leftist status quo on immigration, affirmative action, and hundreds in millions in funding for bilingual education. The Hispanic vote, however, remains solidly Democratic. Meanwhile, the benighted white male continues to form the base of the Republican electorate. For now, they have no place to go.

The most striking examples of how immigration and changing demographics are obliterating the old America are through the culture wars. Legislators in California considered an official holiday for Cinco de Mayo and also one for 1960s leftist Cesar Chavez. Meanwhile, events and symbols of Western civilization remain under attack from multiculturalist fanatics, most notable among them Columbus Day parades and that old perennial, the Confederate battle flag.

These are only two examples. The rise of anti-Western ideologies represents the restrictionists' greatest frustration. Most Americans care nothing for the nostrums of multiculturalism. At the same time, they care little about preserving the British culture that gave birth to American-style liberties. For the vast majority, it seems, the term "American culture" does not mean the political philosophy of Patrick Henry, the collected works of Mark Twain, or a national holiday for George Washington. Rather, it means whatever junk the television and movie people in Hollywood and Manhattan are churning out.

Such complacency isn't the restrictionists' only dilemma. In the 1980s, an immigration crisis existed, but it was confined mostly to urban areas in a few select destinations. This is no longer the case. Now, such once-pleasant small towns as Dalton, Georgia, and Rogers, Arkansas, find themselves overwhelmed by illegals serving the cheap labor needs of American industrialists. Not to be outdone, a recent governor of Iowa, one Tom Vilsack, concocted a plan that would bring no less than 310,000 Third World immigrants to that tranquil mid-western state. The state's business and civic leaders endorsed the plan, but a solid majority of Iowans strongly opposed it.

Does public opinion on immigration count for anything? Not even the events of September 11, 2001, will change the immigration equation. Why?

Mass immigration is a deliberate, politically created policy, deeply rooted in the material interests of the ruling elites of the United States. It serves to depress wages and lower labor costs for large corporations; it serves to

replenish a dwindling number of members in labor unions; it offers entire new constituencies and voting blocs to the two established political parties; it provides a new underclass for which an immense welfare bureaucracy can deliver services and social therapy; and it promises a new “multicultural” society in which cultural elites, already deeply alienated from traditional American institutions, and vast new cultural and political ethnic lobbies can gain power. When a policy is as closely entwined with material interests . . . as immigration now is, it tends to become impervious to ideas and arguments, and it will take more than the terrorism of Sept. 11 . . . to change it.

Francis’s intention is not to drive the reader to despair, but instead to action. Late as it is, grassroots political action can persuade the power elites to enact long-overdue policies. If only a fraction of Americans were dues paying members of the various anti-immigration lobbies currently in Washington, then such groups would have real clout. For now, the only grassroots action taking place is by Arizona ranchers. Fed up by the government’s refusal to patrol the border, many of them have armed themselves in order to defend their property from what literally is a foreign invasion. People in Washington believe the ranchers are the ones behaving out of line.

Still, it is likely that, grassroots activism or not, the Republican Party will once again be forced to address the immigration issue. If immigration continues at current rates, blue-zone America will soon gain the political upper hand. And as already has happened in numerous small towns in red-zone country, an alien culture and alien language will make large inroads into Middle America. Whether the GOP does the right thing, and whether it happens before it’s too late, remains a very open and troubled question.

IV.4 Samuel T. Francis, R.I.P.

(2005)

As with thousands of unreconstructed types from all across the country, I remain shocked and saddened at the death of Samuel Francis.

A native of Chattanooga, Tennessee and a graduate of both Johns Hopkins University and the University of North Carolina, Sam began making his mark as a most skilled polemist in the early 1980s. His essay, “Foreign Policy and the South” was his contribution to Clyde Wilson’s 1982 collection, *Why the South Will Survive*, itself the fiftieth-anniversary sequel to *I’ll Take My Stand*. Sam was also one of the original editors at *Southern Partisan*, where he briefly wrote a regular column, “Under Western Eyes.”

Throughout the 1980s, Sam worked as a legislative assistant to the late Senator John P. East (R-NC), a man as principled and courageous in his conservatism as Francis himself would become. All the while, Sam contributed to several

scholarly publications, including *The World & I*, then edited by his friend Paul Gottfried. In 1989, he began writing his regular column for *Chronicles*. This, in my view, is where his enormous talents were on their greatest display. Two years later, he launched his syndicated column from his base at *The Washington Times*, where he also served as an award-winning editorial writer.

Sam Francis was the greatest political columnist of his generation. By the late 1980s, the much-overblown conservative movement had surrendered entirely to New Deal–New Frontier–Great Society liberalism. Sam’s debut, on the other hand, represented something new under the sun. Here was an essayist with a scholarly, blunt, and witty worldview, all delivered in a muscular prose style. I’d get as much pleasure from Sam’s powerful paragraphs as I would from a passage from William Faulkner or Thomas Wolfe or Andrew Lytle. He was that great a writer.

Sam was Old Right all the way. He published a monograph on James Burnham and was influenced by among others, the late M. E. Bradford. Along with Patrick Buchanan and Thomas Fleming, Sam’s writings defined the defiant and spirited paleoconservatism of the 1990s. Sam was America First in foreign policy. Anti-communist during the 1980s, Sam joined Buchanan and other Old Rightists in opposing both Iraq wars, plus the nation-building fiascos in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. He was a Tenth Amendment man on such domestic issues as school busing and abortion. Sam never wavered in his opposition to the Second Reconstruction still being rained down on his homeland. In his syndicated column, he always defended the Confederate flag and all things good about the conservative South.

He probably made his greatest contribution in his relentless opposition to the ongoing immigration invasion. His columns on that nation-breaking issue were collected in a fine 2002 book, *America Extinguished: Mass Immigration and the Disintegration of American Culture* (Americans for Immigration Control). I would also recommend his 1998 book, *Revolution from the Middle* (Middle America Press) and his essays from the 1980s, collected in *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (University of Missouri Press, 1993).

Sam viewed race and culture as central issues of our time. Here his courage utterly shamed his enemies. Conservatives don’t want to talk about either subject—unless it is to mouth liberal pieties. Not so with Sam. I recall a talk he gave in 1997, where he denounced multiculturalism as an ideology that, at its core, is anti-Christian, anti-Western, anti-male, and anti-heterosexual. Who can dispute that? Just look at the Supreme Court, where Sandra Day O’Connor has essentially ruled that discrimination in the pursuit of diversity is now the law of the land.

All this came with a severe price. In 1981, the younger Francis worked tirelessly to secure Bradford’s nomination and eventual confirmation as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. That nomination was shot down, due mainly to the lobbying efforts of several prominent neoconservative pundits, thus inaugurating a written war that continues to this day. Over a decade later, Sam, too, was a victim of political correctness, conservative-style. At *The*

Washington Times, Sam had won the only two Distinguished Writing Awards of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in that paper's brief history. No matter. In 1995, he was fired from his post at the *Times*, "officially" for comments made at an American Renaissance Conference. In truth, there were conservatives in Washington who had nothing to do with their time but work for Sam's removal from *The Times*, or from "polite company" as one of them termed it.

None of this caused Sam to budge one inch from his worldview or his bold way of saying things. If there was one word for the common reader to describe Sam, it would be *courage*. At times, he had enough courage for the rest of us, enough courage to sustain the Old Right cause.

Sam's death has affected me on a personal level. He figured prominently in three of my books. I chose his 1992 essay "Nationalism Old and New" to close out my 1999 collection, *The Paleoconservatives*. Furthermore, I eagerly read and reviewed his own books. He, in turn, gave a generous review to my 2002 book, *Revolt from the Heartland*. Sam was also a faithful correspondent. It was always a thrill to receive a return letter from a writer I so admired. In reading numerous online testimonials, I notice that other ordinary Americans had the same experience. If you wrote Sam a letter, he'd find time to write back. And why not? Sam was a southern gentleman of the old school. Just think of Thomas Jefferson and Robert E. Lee in their final years, sitting at their desks and writing return letters to complete strangers. Finally, there was his company at John Randolph Society meetings and other similar gatherings, where Sam was always the center of attention. I remember the standing ovation he received just by walking into the room at the Soldiers and Sailors Club in New York City.

For the past fifteen years, Sam Francis's writings filled my consciousness. His passing leaves us not only saddened but also terribly cheated. There's a hole in the sky these days.

IV.5 Another Shot of Courage

Shots Fired: Sam Francis on America's Culture War. Edited by Peter Gemma. Vienna, VA: FGF Books.

(2006)

Shots Fired is a big, generous collection of essays, columns, and speeches by the late, great Sam Francis. Like his friend M.E. Bradford, Sam, all too soon, has passed on to the ages. His writings live yet. Sam's standing in the pantheon of southern letters will, I think, be a unique one. He was both the greatest polemist in modern America and certainly in all of twentieth-century southern literature (his writing is literature). On addressing the crisis of the West—cultural, economic, demographic, and spiritual—Sam Francis was as important a writer as anyone on either side of the Atlantic.

Sam was not a single-issue writer. This book covers topics ranging from war, politics, religion, education, and history, plus his views on populism, the legacies

of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the uselessness of the “Grand Old Stupid Party,” and a blistering critique of a conservative movement that has surrendered to all the doctrines of modern liberalism.

Influenced by such thinkers as James Burnham and Christopher Lasch, Sam traced the roots of Western decline to what Lasch termed “the revolt of the elites,” that managerial class of multi-nationalists who have no allegiance to particular nations and their distinct peoples. An example might be your average corporate executive who has more in common with his counterpart in Tokyo or Beijing than folks in his own hometown. Thus, the contempt by the elites for the old America, for a people rooted by land and blood, a people who want no part of globalist upheavals. Over the years, the elites have followed a pattern: in search of cheap labor they will move their plants from, say, unionized New Jersey to non-union South Carolina. Along come more free-trade pacts, and it’s now off from Greenville to Brazil. That doesn’t work either, so the plant moves on to China, the globalists’ dream nation of slave laborers. Meanwhile, what new jobs there are in America go mostly to illegal or legal alien labor. (For this, consult the studies of the economist Ed Rubenstein.)

Multi-nationalists are the front line generals in the anti-Western culture war. On the other side was Sam Francis. Sam did not seek out a culture war. A disciple of James Burnham (and the man’s first biographer), Francis remained interested in the world of power: who wields it, what they do with it, and the fate of those left out in the cold. (It is advisable, Sam wrote in an early essay, to be the hammer rather than the anvil.) But when his people, their history and heritage were attacked, he returned fire with an energy and eloquence that none could match. Sam, after all, could trace his ancestry to both the Revolutionary War and the War Between the States. As with M. E. Bradford, his writing was felt history at work.

Sam, too, was explicit. Countering the attacks on the Christmas holiday, the Confederate flag, such icons as Thomas Jefferson, the support for mass immigration, affirmative action, and the re-writing of textbooks, Sam declared multiculturalism to be an anti-Christian, anti-white ideology, with immigration a political strategy to displace America’s one-time right-of-center majority. Sam’s explicitness had its own strategy, namely to wake up those suburbanites hiding from the realities of twenty-first-century America. And it cost him. Conservatives could not abide such blunt language. They long considered him a menace to the movement, and eventually he lost his key position at *The Washington Times*. Still, Internet technology and Sam’s own doggedness kept his voice loud and clear until his untimely end.

That bluntness extended to the race issue, which, rightly or wrongly, is what Sam is remembered for. This wasn’t always the case. Sam, as noted, started out as a disciple of Burnham, more concerned with how the elites in government, the educational system, the media, and the entertainment industry attempt to

dominate the masses. In time, Sam took the Jean Raspail worldview as articulated in the latter's apocalyptic novel, *The Camp of the Saints*: A guilt-ridden West allowing the global South to literally overrun the global North. Sam, too, was influenced by such historical pessimists as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, who in the years following World War I, gloomily speculated that the demise of the West was at hand. Sam's views also had a practical side. A political scientist, Sam maintained that the diminution of the non-Hispanic white working class and white middle class vote would make it nearly impossible for the Republican Party to ever capture the White House. He was hardly alone in such thinking. In all, Sam's views were complex. Unlike other conservatives, Sam opposed what he saw as unnecessary wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Bill Kaufmann, Sam's one-time colleague at *Chronicles*, liked to point out that opponents of Third World immigration, men often smeared as racists, also opposed Anglo-American wars against impoverished Third World nations whose governments were hardly enemies of the United States.

Cultural warrior, America Firster, a man of the West—what did Sam Francis stand for? His worldview was a mixture of populism and nationalism. It was populist in that it called for a revolt of Middle America radicals against the globalist ideology of open borders, free trade, and wars for democracy. It was nationalist in that he hoped that such populists would not just send a message, but, in fact, would dispose of the present ruling class and enthrone themselves as the new elite.

Francis was not a big-government man. He opposed the two Republican Party wars in Iraq. He called for the dismantling of the Departments of Education, Commerce, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services. He also rejected the libertarian ideal. Working people like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and expect such programs to be there for them once their working days have ended. To reform such entitlement programs would scare off needed voters. Instead, Francis preached the politics of survival: an immigration moratorium and trade protection that would defend both national identities and a middle-class way of life for blue-collar workers.

Sam, above all, was an activist. Once I heard him speak at a conference in New York. After the talk, an audience member reiterated the usual complaints of a world gone to hell. Sam wanted no part of it. Don't tell me, he basically replied, do something about it. Sam, however, did not believe in Man on Horseback fairy tales. What was needed was a political party to combat liberalism. Like Pat Buchanan and Tom Fleming, Sam would be more at home with the Euroskeptical parties of western Europe. A man, at least, can go down fighting.

Tribalism is a theme in his work, but so too is the idea of community, of work and dignity. What's wrong with communities built around the textile mill, the steel mill, the auto plant, and the coal mines? Or, as Andrew Lytle might counter, what's wrong with one built around the family farm? What's wrong with

the working man honoring his ancestors? Well, nothing. But the working man can't take such things for granted. And that's where power, Sam's other great theme, comes in.

As the twenty-first century progresses, the importance of tribalism, the struggle between globalism and localism, the merchant elites and the people—and with it, the work of Sam Francis—may yet loom large. We are not finished—not by a long shot—with Sam Francis. Let's hope that it is all resolved, as Sam would have wanted, in a humane and democratic manner.

Notes

- 1 After an extended campaign against him, Francis, in 1996, was fired from his editorial position at *The Washington Times*.
- 2 In Brooklyn, New York, for instance, the borough president, under pressure from nameless black politicians, removed the portrait of Washington in that borough's council chambers. In 2004, the school board in Berkley, California renamed an elementary school once named for Lincoln. The school board in New Orleans also renamed an elementary school that was named for Washington. The hatefest against Thomas Jefferson is familiar to anyone in touch with the news.

PART V

A Republic of Letters



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V.1 Saul Bellow

An Appreciation

(2005)

It was the fall of 1975. The cover story in that week's *Newsweek* was about Saul Bellow, "America's Master Novelist." I had to find out who this master novelist was. *Humboldt's Gift* was Bellow's latest novel, the one being celebrated in that issue. Reading it was one of my first introductions to great literature. Many other experiences would follow, but Bellow, along with Thomas Wolfe, was there first.

Few American writers have enjoyed so much acclaim for such an extensive period of time as Saul Bellow (1915–2005). In his long and productive career, Bellow won a Pulitzer Prize, three National Book Awards, and, in 1976, the Nobel Prize. The post–World War II era was marked by a string of ambitious novelists, all striving to reach the heights scaled by Faulkner and Hemingway. Of that generation, Bellow was the only Nobel laureate. But the prize was not a "ticket to one's own funeral" (as T.S. Eliot dryly observed). Bellow was productive for a good quarter of a century following that honor.

Longevity helped. It secured Bellow new generations of admirers. At first, Bellow was a star novelist of *The Partisan Review* crowd; later, of leading New York critics. That road led to favorable publicity in such mass circulation publications as *Life* and, constantly, in *The New York Times*. Bellow outlived one generation of critics and found new ones, especially the British novelist Martin Amis, who declared Bellow and Vladimir Nabokov as the twentieth century's two leading fiction writers. Bellow lived long enough to write superbly crafted fiction well into his seventies and eighties. Who knows when that will happen again? Bellow's publishing career began with *Dangling Man* (1944), a novel about a young Chicago man who resists, then accepts, the regimentation of military life. An incredible fifty-six years later, Bellow, at age eighty-five, published *Ravelstein*, another Chicago-based novel. A fictional account of the novelist's friendship with the conservative scholar Allan Bloom, *Ravelstein*, Amis enthused, was "a masterpiece with no analogues. The world has never heard this prose before: prose of such tremulous and crystallized beauty." Later, Bellow wrote *A Theft* (1989), *The Actual* (1997), and, most notably, a short story, "Something to Remember Me By," in which a Depression-era Chicago youth escapes a comical adventure with a thieving prostitute in order to be with his dying mother. By then, Bellow's fiction had a special sweetness to it, a stubborn allegiance to the wonder of existence. Bellow, in the end, was always a life-affirming novelist.

To me, Bellow was America's great urban novelist. His career took off with the 1953 publication of *The Adventures of Augie March*, a sprawling, picturesque novel, one of several in which Chicago—as you might guess by now, Bellow's hometown—emerged more as a major character than a mere backdrop. His most important work may be *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, a 1970 novel about a Holocaust

survivor's spare observations of late 1960s life in New York City. The creator of Augie March *had* to write a novel like *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. City life in *The Adventures of Augie March*, a novel whose action begins in the 1920s, was fascinating, exciting, colorful, and full of possibilities. By the 1960s, such venues had changed dramatically. Now urban centers had become patently uncivilized. Bellow was the one novelist to chronicle that descent. In many respects, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* was the perfect 1960s novel: crime, promiscuity, obscenity, and greed all collide with a boiling, dangerous Upper West Side Manhattan serving as a main character.

Bellow was a Gemini and this (even though I don't follow the stars) may explain the shifting poles of expression in his fiction. Big, lyrical novels like *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King*, and *Humboldt's Gift* were bookended by gloomier volumes: *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. There is Augie March's victory cry, "Look at me, going everywhere!" plus Eugene Henderson's defiant, "I want! I want!" Contrast this with Tommy Wilhelm, the loser hero of *Seize the Day*, a failed actor and salesman who in one day on that same Upper West Side loses the sympathy of his wife and father, not to mention his last \$700 in the stock market, all on the bad advice of a big-city con man. After writing *Augie March*, Bellow offered that life isn't always so open-ended. Characters like Tommy Wilhelm, men with no room to maneuver, are part of the drama also.

In politics, Bellow considered himself to be "some sort of liberal," while also being critical of political correctness, which he declared to be a mortal enemy of free speech and, in general, healthy political discussion. In literary matters, Bellow was a traditionalist, a man of the West, a defender of the Western canon as it was being savaged by multiculturalist malcontents. Responding to the usual grievances, Bellow, in a soon-famous quip, wondered: "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I'd be glad to read him." It didn't make him many friends, and even such longtime admirers as Alfred Kazin scolded the new maverick.

As a prose stylist and master of narrative fiction, Bellow can stand with other American greats: Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Thomas Wolfe, and William Faulkner. What did he have to say? *Mr. Sammler's Planet* was his signature "decline of the West" novel, a theme that is an absolute imperative for any serious writer. Possibly owing to the upheaval around him, matters of the soul were paramount to his writings. Or, to borrow from Reinhold Niebuhr, the quest was how to be a moral man in an immoral society. Following Bellow's death, several critics quoted from a passage from his best-selling 1964 novel, *Herzog*. The new questions, he wrote, were "[how] to be a man. In a city. In a century of transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous control."

Alienation is not the entire American story—even of the past century. But it is an important one. The enormities that Bellow wrestled with might drive one

to traditionalism, even if it meant sounding—and acting—like a reactionary. At times, Bellow mourned the passing of the High Middle Ages. And for decades, he lived part of the year in rural Vermont, learning the ways of self-sufficiency. As befitting a man of great ambition, family life was a struggle for Bellow, but he finally found contentment in his final marriage to a much younger former graduate school student.

What Saul Bellow had to say was of great significance. And his wide-ranging works, mixing comedy, high seriousness, and deep reflection among a colorful and full-blooded cast of characters will always be an inspiration to all who read them.

Existence Is the Job

Saul Bellow: Letters. Benjamin Taylor, editor. New York: Viking.

(2010)

Throughout this generous selection of Saul Bellow's correspondence, the writer himself constantly refers to his dilatory ways in answering letters. Bellow, as always, was fighting his lazy streak with enormous energy. This 571-page volume, according to its editor, amounts to only two-fifths of Bellow's known correspondence. (His letters to childhood friend Isaac Rosenfeld were destroyed, a case similar to John Crowe Ransom burning all of his hefty correspondence, losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process). Thanks to its length, this book reads like a Bellow novel: a mixture of high culture and streetwise fun, letters to famous writers and neighborhood pals from Bellow's native West Side Chicago. Bellow came of age when American writers, especially novelists, were highly competitive, vying in numerous works to inherit the crowns of Hemingway and Faulkner. The middle class was booming. The market for novels was large. The energy, consequently, among writers was palpable. Bellow's list of correspondence with fellow writers is impressive: Wright Morris, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, John Cheever, Ralph Ellison, Bernard Malamud, William Kennedy, Martin Amis, Jean Stafford, Robert Penn Warren, and J. F. Powers, among many others. Bellow could be critical of his friends, casting doubts about Warren's involvement in the New Criticism, Malamud's *A New Life*, or Roth's Nathan Zuckerman novels. But other than with the cases of Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, or John Updike, Bellow was not competitive. He had easy friendships with writers who otherwise might have been rivals. The letters to Cynthia Ozick are especially revealing. Writing in his seventies, Bellow admitted that during the 1940s, when his fellow Jews were facing unimaginable persecution in Europe, he was more concerned with establishing a writing career.

Longevity had its benefits. In his later years, Bellow was able to move beyond the romantic ego and address the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century in such novels as *The Bellarosa Connection* and *Ravelstein*. On the other hand, letters to Bellow's Chicago pals, especially to one Louis Lasco, are highly entertaining.

Bellow's loyalty to Chicago was legendary. He didn't idealize his hometown, but he was loyal, even after much of that vast Midwest metropolis became unrecognizable. Fame didn't prevent Bellow from attending high school reunions and keeping in touch with friends of more modest achievements. One guesses that Bellow, whose tumultuous personal life became the stuff of gossip page fodder, admired those friends with stable domestic lives.

Letters reads like a Bellow novel. Bellow's fiction includes shorter, gloomier tomes such as *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and *The Dean's December*, as well as larger, more expansive fiction on the human comedy: *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, and *Humboldt's Gift*. Humor predominates here, recalling that Bellow once observed his novels were a way of "kidding myself to Jesus." Bellow loved to talk in parables and one-liners as a way to make sense of life's weightier questions. Writing, in 1998, to his longtime friend Richard Stern, he finds a way to deal with old age.

I wouldn't throw in the towel—yet. A little anecdote to illustrate . . . An old man lives in the forest alone and gathers winter fuel and finds himself one day unable to lift his burden of sticks. He raises his eyes to heaven and says, "O God, send me Death," and when Death comes Death says, "Did you send for me, sir?" The old man replies, "Yes, lend me a hand with these sticks. Just put them on my shoulder and I'll do the rest."

You may want that towel one day to wipe your inspired brow.

Seriousness abounds also. Bellow was a born contrarian, often bucking trends for the sake of it, as witnessed by his decision to attend a gathering of artists at Lyndon Johnson's White House, despite a public boycott of the event as a way to protest the Vietnam War, one staged by many of Bellow's New York writer friends. Bellow rejected the fashionable nihilism of the 1960s, the cynicism of the 1970s, and the multiculturalism and political correctness that took hold in the 1980s and '90s. At the 1986 International PEN conference, one organized by Mailer and held in New York City, an event attended by leading writers from across the free world, Bellow defended the vision—and the success—of the Founding Fathers, a stand that earned him a strong rebuke from the German novelist Günter Grass, a man obsessed with the squalor of New York's South Bronx neighborhood. By the early 1990s, however, Bellow seemed overwhelmed by American-style barbarism, a despair that echoes his famous fictional characters: Artur Sammler of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, who wonders if it is time to "blow this great blue, white, green planet," or Charlie Citrine of *Humboldt's Gift*, who pines to leave America altogether for a new life in Switzerland. Writing in 1992 to the Israeli writer John Auerbach, Bellow waxes gloomily on the American scene:

What a freaky lot we are; everybody entertaining everybody else. This has gotten even to the top of the mafia—[John] Gotti clearly behaves at his trial like Marlon Brando. And of course the politicians at this season are

all playing “Candidates.” . . . On the air and in the papers the future of the US is debated, some arguing that we will soon belong to the Third World. The Japanese and the Germans are ahead of us. The President is weak and vain . . . And not even the cemeteries are tranquil. A shopping mall has been “developed” near the graves of my parents, and the loudspeakers broadcast rock music day and night.

You mustn’t think I’m depressed—I’m only down at the moment. Writing to dear friends whom I would love to see every day makes me a little melancholy.

The title of this review comes from a line from Bellow’s last novel, *Ravelstein*, a book about his friend Allan Bloom, one published when the novelist was eighty-five years old. Bellow was a survivor of many a literary skirmish; more importantly, in both childhood and old age, he prevailed over life-threatening illnesses. His life-affirming vision, plus his preoccupation with the workings of the soul, came from a sheer love of life, most memorably expressed by Augie March, the fictional character of this third novel. Mailer once remarked on how Ernest Hemingway’s suicide at the relatively young age of sixty-one shocked his own generation into a valuable lesson: don’t take yourself so seriously. Whether this influenced Bellow is unknown, but he did not take his status in the literary world so gravely as to lose his mind. Plus, he had seen many a writer friend go to an early grave: John Berryman, Delmore Schwartz, and Isaac Rosenfeld. Bellow’s longevity was also due to life in Chicago. Although he spent much of his adulthood in the New York area among writers from the highly politicized *Partisan Review* circle, the decision to move back to his rowdy but unpretentious hometown was a wise one. Chicago allowed Bellow to be himself, to write as he pleased without having to take any dramatic political or social stands.

Finally, *Letters*, like a good biography, charts the parlous existence of the artist in modern America. Bellow was a writer determined to have those three or four hours every morning to himself, even if it meant getting by for years on part-time and low-paying teaching jobs, all with predictable consequences to domestic life. It wasn’t until 1963, when, with the help of his friend the conservative sociologist Edward Shils, that Bellow was able to secure a full-time position at the University of Chicago. In 1953, Bellow received his first great critical success with *The Adventures of Augie March*. A decade later, Bellow, to his surprise, achieved financial success with *Herzog*. (Bellow naively thought his early novels, *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, would sell well. By the time *Herzog* was published, he was resigned to financial failure, expecting that novel about a half-crazed, letter-writing college professor to sell only 8,000 copies or so.) But it wasn’t until his seventies that Bellow found happiness in married life with his union to a much younger graduate school student.

Despite the turmoil of his personal life, Bellow had a gift for friendship. Into old age, he remained a “booster and rooter” to fellow novelists still going at it: Roth, Amis, and Kennedy. In later letters to the poet Karl Shapiro, Bellow,

although troubled about the future of humane letters, expressed no regrets about choosing a vocation looked at with scorn in money-making America. This volume celebrates an old-fashioned life in letters, an attempt to keep the cause of literature alive. Bellow's career was about more than an ambitious individual seeking fame. He also spent no less than sixty-five years in the classroom, teaching the classics of the Western canon. In addition, he co-founded and edited three publications of very brief existence: *The Noble Savage*, *Anon*, and *News from the Republic of Letters*. For Bellow's readers, this volume, coming five years after the author's death, is a much-needed shot of great prose. Once again, Bellow lives.

V.2 Updike at Rest

(2009)

Recent years have seen the passing of the giants of modern fiction: Saul Bellow, William Styron, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, and George Garrett. The untimely death of John Updike last January at age seventy-six, more than all the others, quietly closes the door on the post-World War II era of American literature. Wendell Berry and Tom Wolfe are still with us, but the age of the great American novelist—one that began with Ernest Hemingway and continued into the 1990s—has suffered another blow.

Writing in *The New York Times*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt eulogized Updike as producing a body of work “so vast, protean, and lyrical as to place him in the first rank of American authors.” Indeed, Updike was the most prolific author of serious fiction in American history. Even more so than Mailer, Updike, for decades, was an ongoing presence in American culture. T.S. Eliot once wrote that an author had two choices in getting recognition: either deluge the reading public by publishing constantly or by publishing rarely, but with maximum expectations around that particular work. Updike chose the former route; he was determined to publish one (or more) books a year, even when it might have been wiser to take some time between publications. Take, for instance, a 2002 novel, *Seek My Face*, a fictional account of the modern American art scene. It was a 276-page effort, complete with adultery, failed marriages, and wayward children. The novel came and went, and as a longtime fan, I wondered if Updike might have been better served by taking some time off to research the subject (among his many talents, he was a perceptive art critic) and produce a thorough history of recent American art.

With John Updike, everything comes back to his Rabbit Angstrom novels, that brilliant, always entertaining quartet of *Rabbit*, *Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990). The latter two both won the Pulitzer Prize, and in 2001, Updike obliged his readers by producing a novella, *Rabbit Remembered*, which continues the story of Rabbit's remarried spouse, plus his children and grandchildren. Indeed, Updike's strength was always with those

domestic scenes that proliferate throughout his fiction: husbands and wives, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren. Here is the vitality, the passion, and ultimately the essence of life. What else is there? Those countless scenes in numerous novels all dramatizing the joys and complexities of family life made the reader desire to have a big family too.

With Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom, Updike hit the jackpot. Has there ever been a more intriguing, irresistible character in all of American fiction? Rabbit lived the dream of every red-blooded American boy: the high school jock who breaks every basketball scoring record in his rural Pennsylvania school district. Is there life after high school? For Rabbit, it didn’t seem possible, but the effort was worth the ride. Rabbit was not, as some critics have suggested, a middle-aged reactionary bewildered by changing times. Not at all. Rabbit jumped headfirst into life’s experiences, working as a salesman and later a Linotype operator before hitting it big as a Toyota car dealer, a job he inherited after his father-in-law, an old-fashioned small-business Republican, passed away. Consider this brief dialogue with one Thelma Harrison, a neighbor turned mistress, who blurts out her great love for Rabbit. Our bemused hero asks what is it that makes her so fond of him.

“Oh, darling. Everything. Your height and the way you move, as if you’re still a skinny twenty-five. The way you never sit down anywhere without making sure there’s a way out. Your little provisional smile, like a little boy at some party where the bullies might get him the next minute. Your good humor. You *believe* in people so—Webb, you hang on his words where nobody else pays any attention, and Janice [Rabbit’s wife], you’re so proud of her it’s pathetic. It’s not as if she can *do* anything. Even her tennis coach, Doris Kaufmann was telling us, really—”

“Well it’s nice to see her have fun at something, she’s had a kind of dreary life.”

“See? You’re just terribly generous. You’re so grateful to be anywhere, you think that tacky club and that hideous house of Cindy’s are heaven. It’s wonderful. You’re so glad to be alive.”

“Well, I mean, considering the alternative—”

“It kills me. I love you *so much* for it. . . .”

Rabbit was the prototypical Everyman, but comparisons to other salesmen characters, especially the dejected Willy Loman, are false. Rabbit did love life, from the country club in suburban Pennsylvania to the basketball court in overdeveloped Fort Myers, Florida, where he meets his end with a heart attack. Rabbit’s death was premature, but the way it happened made sense. The quartet opens with a younger, more anxious Rabbit playing a pickup game in his Pennsylvania hometown with local youngsters still in awe of this high school legend. It ends 1,500 pages later, with an equally determined but aging Rabbit playing a no-holds-barred one-on-one game with a Florida youth who wonders what the

fuss is all about. Martin Amis, always a keen observer of American fiction, got the entire drama down right.

An unfettered style is the central gamble of the [Rabbit] tetralogy. It is a style that sees the big picture—time and space—in every passing snapshot and billboard. Updike is sometimes accused of overburdening Harry's huddled mind; but the Rabbit books would be paltry things if they were exercises in mere mimesis. He lets the ordinary man sing and soar. For the ordinary man sings and soars in any case, but silently, until the novelist intercedes.

As a novelist and short story writer, Updike was a contemporary of John Cheever and Peter DeVries, an artist who put a human face on life in suburbia, that sprawling venue where, for better or worse, much of post-World War II America defined itself. As a critic, Updike was equally prolific, publishing, once every decade, thick volumes of reviews and essays. In his non-fiction, Updike was very much a successor to Edmund Wilson. Updike championed no school of thought, no theory of criticism; he simply produced reams and reams of reviews on books by authors from all corners of the Earth, many of them originally appearing in his beloved *The New Yorker*, where Updike made his publishing home for over fifty years.

Overall, Updike was an optimist—sometimes defiantly so—about the American prospect. In stories and interviews, Updike occasionally mourned the passing of pre-Pearl Harbor America, a nation that ran on nickels and dimes, one where Americans at least knew who they were. But Updike was also grateful to live in a nation prosperous enough to give an ambitious and hard-working small-town boy from Pennsylvania a good living at a profession he loved. Consider also this passage from *Rabbit at Rest*. It may not sum up Updike's worldview entirely, but it does stand out. The occasion is a Fourth of July parade in fictional Brewster, Pennsylvania (a town based on Reading). Rabbit was chosen to play Uncle Sam. And here are his observations:

The whole town he knew had been swallowed up . . . but another has taken its place, younger, more naked, less fearful, better. And it still loves him, as it did when he would score forty-two points for them in a single home game. He is a legend, a walking cloud. Inside him a droplet of explosive has opened his veins like flower petals uncurling in the sun. His eyes are burning with sweat or something allergic, his head aches under the pressure cooker of the tall top hat. . . . Scanning the human melt for the glint of a familiar face, Harry sees instead a beer can being brazenly passed back and forth, the flash of a myopic child's earnest spectacles, a silver hoop earring the lobe of a Hispanic-looking girl. . . . From far back in the still-unwinding parade the bagpipers keen a Highland killing song and the rock

impersonator whimpers “. . . imagine all the *people*” and closer to the front, on a scratchy tape through crackling speakers, Kate Smith belts out, dead as she is, dragged into the grave by sheer gangrenous weight, “God Bless America”—“. . . to the oceans, white with *foam*.” Harry’s eyes burn and the impression giddily—as if he has been lifted up to survey all human history—grows upon him, making his heart thump worse and worse, that all in all, this is the happiest . . . country the world has ever seen.

Will that American make it? Either way, John Updike’s death was met with great consternation from his legion of readers. The day after, this author realized that he would never again walk into a public library and check out Updike’s latest novel—something I had been doing for over thirty years. Updike’s death was unexpected, but as importantly, it marked the passing of one who spoke for a generation, a reliable and steady voice of an age when the middle class was not the proletariat but a most desirable way of life.

V.3 J. D. Salinger: All’s Well That Ends Well

(2010)

“Reading *The Catcher in the Rye* used be an essential rite of passage [in America], almost as important as getting your learner’s permit.” So claimed Charles McGrath, writing in *The New York Times* on the occasion of the death of J. D. Salinger.

And how! After learning of Salinger’s death, I felt like saying to my college-educated work colleagues, “Raise your hand if you *haven’t* read *The Catcher in the Rye*.”

Who didn’t read it? For decades, that maroon paperback of *The Catcher in the Rye* with the title and author’s name embossed in gold was as much as part of popular culture as *The Tonight Show*, McDonald’s, or Coca-Cola—with its contents slightly more nourishing. I read *Catcher* when I was nineteen, already feeling I was several years behind the curve. Salinger was the Greta Garbo of American literature: famous, but in permanent seclusion. In time, speculation about his withdrawal from the circus of American life superseded any talk about his body of work. Since the 1950s, Holden Caulfield, the caustic young hero of *Catcher* has been compared to Huckleberry Finn as the most famous adolescent in American fiction. Holden, as the private school flunk-out, grabbed the reader’s attention from the novel’s first lines. If memory serves, I read *Catcher* in one setting. And why not? Salinger’s writing style, the most distinctive since the halcyon days of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, was entirely accessible to the common reader. There was also Holden on his own in the world, itself a most common teenage fantasy. Not only that, Holden was by himself for three days in his hometown, New York City: how would *that* turn out? Holden’s academic dilemma only heightened the suspense. In those more innocent days of 1951, a teenager’s worst nightmare was having to tell their parents they had just flunked out of school. Mostly, it was Holden’s broadsides

against the “phonies” of the world that struck the loudest chord. Young people approach the world with great sincerity and innocence. The cynical behavior by the adult population comes as a huge disappointment. In other words, look at what kind of world these ridiculous adults will leave us with.

One of the novel’s biggest fans was William Faulkner. Speaking at the University of Virginia in 1958, Faulkner admitted he had not read much contemporary fiction. But he had read *Catcher* and declared it as the best novel from the rising generation. Writing in his always lyrical style, Faulkner, who also compared Holden to Huck Finn, gave the novel a brief but most dramatic reading. He declared that *Catcher*

expresses completely what I have tried to say: a youth, father to what will, must someday be a man, more intelligent than some and more sensitive than most, who . . . because God perhaps had put it there, loved man and wished to be a part of mankind, humankind, who tried to join the human race and failed. To me, his tragedy was not that he was, as he perhaps thought, not tough enough or brave enough or deserving enough to be accepted into humanity. His tragedy was that when he attempted to enter the human race, there was no human race there. There was nothing for him to do save buzz, frantic and inviolate, inside the glass walls of his tumbler until he either gave up or was himself by himself, by his own frantic buzzing, destroyed.

Holden, in the end, was not destroyed. He was brought back to sanity by his younger sister, Phoebe. Holden had an older brother, D.B., a successful Hollywood screenwriter. Another brother, Allie, has passed away. However, Holden and Phoebe idolized each other. Holden’s protectiveness towards his younger sister, dramatized in the famous carousel scene at the Central Park Zoo, is his first real growing-up experience. Phoebe, in turn, is the only family member Holden converses with during his three-day wandering adventure. He is now able to escape adolescence—and such fantasies as traveling out West. Holden also now has the strength to face his parents and eventually enroll in another private school. Family love saves him from the abyss.

Salinger was more than a one-book writer. In the 1950s, he was considered one of the top three or four novelists in America. In 1961, for instance, he found his visage on the cover of *Time*. Salinger had also found a home at *The New Yorker*, where his stories were guaranteed to find a large audience and a hefty paycheck. Throughout the 1960s and ’70s, two of his other works, namely *Nine Stories* and *Franny and Zooey*, were considered as important as *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger’s fiction influenced numerous writers, including John Updike, Philip Roth, Richard Yates, and Harold Brodkey. Published in one volume, two later novellas, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* and *Seymour: An Introduction*, concerned the fictional Glass family who, according to acquaintances, occupied much of his later, unpublished work.

Salinger's last published work was a novella, "Hapworth 16, 1924," which took up most of the June 19, 1965, issue of *The New Yorker*. The story continued long-time themes of youth and large family life (the Glass family consisted of no less than seven children). The novella also reflected Salinger's interest in Eastern religions. By the 1960s, Salinger had moved from Manhattan to rural New Hampshire, where he would live for the rest of his life. Salinger's publishing days were over, even though he still worked regularly on fiction projects. Why the retreat into seclusion? It could be that Salinger felt his best work was behind him. Why subject himself to carping criticism when he already had an enduring masterpiece under his belt? One recalls T. S. Eliot, in his later years, not worrying much about his lack of a poetic output. After all, Eliot reasoned, there was only one "The Waste Land" in him. That was good enough for one lifetime. Salinger, similarly, had made his mark, plus he had influenced a new generation of writers. Unlike his contemporaries, Salinger did not address the turmoil now roiling American life. The madness of America wasn't for him. Nor could he go back to his hometown, which by the 1970s, was unrecognizable to anyone who remembered New York in the days of Holden Caulfield. "Salinger had remarked that he was in this world, but not of it," read a family statement following his death.

"There is a marvelous peace in not publishing," Salinger told *The New York Times* in a 1974 interview. "It's peaceful. Still. Publishing is a terrible invasion of my privacy. I like to write. I love to write. But I write just for myself and my own pleasure."

That same peace he found in writing without the demands of publishing was accompanied by a longtime peace gained by living in New Hampshire, a state that Robert Frost found equally congenial. Salinger married three times, the last time in 1988, a union that lasted until his death. His first marriage produced two children, a daughter, Margaret, who later wrote a revealing memoir, and a son, Matt, a successful actor and producer. Salinger had three grandchildren and enjoyed such rituals of small-town life as attending local high school sporting events. His neighbors knew him, and both respected and protected his hard-fought privacy. J. D. Salinger is gone, but Holden Caulfield lives on. *The Catcher in the Rye* remains ever popular, chugging along at 250,000 paperback sales per year. Yes, raise your hand if you haven't read *The Catcher in the Rye*.

V.4 T. S. Eliot, Editor

The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 2: 1923–1925. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, editors. London: Faber and Faber.

(2009)

"Tom not only says he is tough, but [he] is tough." So claimed Ada Eliot, the poet's older sister in a letter written during the mid-1930s.

Well, he had better be tough. Published a good twenty-two years after Volume 1 (which is being released in a revised form), Volume 2 of the *Letters of*

T. S. Eliot finds the famed poet as busy as ever, with no peace of mind in sight. Volume 1 detailed the young Eliot's coming conquest of the highly competitive London literary scene, the publication of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land," plus such essays as "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Volume 2 picks up with Eliot in the middle of a grueling daily grind: The eight-hours-a-day job at Lloyds Bank, tending to his perpetually ill wife Vivien and then, starting at around 8:00 p.m., editorial work on *Criterion*, the literary journal that Eliot hoped would transform English letters. The work at Lloyds wasn't about flipping pound notes. Eliot had to translate wartime debt notes from no less than six foreign languages, while supervising a small staff. It was enough to make a man want to have relaxing evenings at home. Charlotte Eliot, the poet's mother, thought her son was wasting his time with *Criterion*. Instead, he should use his rare free hours to write more poetry. Indeed, throughout this thick volume, "The Waste Land" pops up on a regular basis, its fame building higher and higher, like a rolling wave. (In one humorous letter, a niece of Eliot tries to explain the complex poem to her brother.)

Eliot was a powerful poet, but not a prolific one. At the same time, he was devoted to *Criterion*. Early on, he set a circulation goal of 3,000. This, Eliot estimated, would allow him to quit his job at the bank and work full time at the journal, while still finding time to write. Eliot believed that literary quarterlies, despite their modest circulation, played a vital role in the literature of any nation. The high quality of their individual works would find their way to established publishing houses, eventually reaching an audience among middle-class readers. Eliot might agree with his friend the poet Allen Tate, who declared, "[The] way to give the public what it resentfully needs is to discredit the inferior ideas of the age by exposing them to the criticism of the superior ideas." That is what *Criterion* could do. Eliot gave out faint hope that *Criterion* would become, first, a cultural force and by that achievement a political one too.

Eliot also believed in European unity. He was a Metternich of culture, hoping for a concert of Europe in things literary: verse, fiction, criticism, and philosophy. And so, Eliot sought out the best of European writing, from Ireland to Russia. Being multilingual helped immensely. Eliot, for instance, was able to solicit essays from Paul Valéry and Herman Hesse by writing to those gentlemen in their native tongues. *Criterion's* circulation never reached 3,000, but it was an ambitious journal, influencing the rise of the New Criticism and such American publications as Robert Penn Warren's and Cleanth Brooks's *Southern Review*, John Crowe Ransom's *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Sewanee Review*, as it was later edited by Tate and Andrew Lytle. At the same time, consider the talent Eliot could choose from: Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Sir Herbert Read, Virginia Woolf, Paul Valéry, Wyndham Lewis, D.H. Lawrence, and Owen Barfield were regular contributors. It was an exciting time in the life of the imagination. Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf were doing something monumental: they gave the twentieth century a literature, a legacy for the post-World War II generation to build upon. During this time period,

the peak of Eliot's fame came in an April 1925 profile in *Vogue*, one written by Richard Aldington, an editor at *Criterion*, a man who later had a serious falling-out with Eliot. In *Vogue*, however, Aldington succinctly summed up both the signal achievements of Eliot's brief time in England and the poet's vast ambitions.

It is only ten years since he [Eliot] came here, quite unknown, from America, with the manuscript of *Prufrock* in his baggage. . . . [One] can say that within a decade his four small volumes have given him the reputation at least of showing more promise, both as a poet and as a critic, than any English writer of his generation. . . . [Here] is a modern among moderns who is not scared of the past, who gladly acknowledges his immense debts to Aristotle and Dante; a man of culture who is intensely preoccupied with the problems of modern art. His thought is destructive because it attempts to annihilate Romanticism—aesthetic, moral and political. But it is constructive because it attempts to put something better in its place.

Despite his fame and the sixteen-hour workdays, Eliot failed to make *Criterion* the radiant center of the age. In 1939, with Europe set to go to war again, he shut down the publication altogether. Eliot cited a “depression of spirits,” namely, the fatigue from running the same journal for seventeen years. Depression also came from the fact that instead of a postwar Europe united, at peace, and creative again in the grand Western tradition, there would be another suicidal continental war. *Criterion* was a political failure, even though its brilliance would live on. Also, by 1925, Eliot had found a financial angel. That year, Geoffrey Faber hired him to work at the publishing firm of that same name. Eliot now had a home for his manuscripts, plus steady work as poetry editor (among his poets were W.H. Auden, Ted Hughes, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice.) Faber also subsidized *Criterion* for the remainder of its lifespan. Years later, Faber would correctly claim that he had “saved Eliot for poetry.” At the same time, Eliot had earned his position at Faber. The poetry, essays, and work at *Criterion* had made him the right man for the job. Plus, Eliot, the son of a successful St. Louis manufacturer, had a keen interest in the business side of publishing.

The person who gave *Criterion* its name was Eliot's troubled wife, Vivien. It's fair to say this marriage was an epic misalliance. Each was attracted to the novelty of the other: Eliot to Vivien's outgoing ways, Vivien to her future husband's American background. Plus, Vivien thought she was doing the cause of poetry a favor by marrying Eliot (they did so only after a few months of courtship). If they married, Eliot could stay in England and write poetry under the watchful eye of his great admirer Ezra Pound. If not, then it was back to America for a dull career in academia. When Vivien was healthy, Eliot had time to write poetry before going off to work at Lloyds. But as this volume painfully illustrates, Vivien's numerous illnesses overwhelmed her husband, who needed to constantly borrow money from his mother to help pay for his wife's doctor bills. In the culture war

over T.S. Eliot, his tumultuous marriage often moves to center stage. *Tom and Viv*, a film released in 1994 during a peak of anti-Eliot activity, portrays Vivien as a suffering victim, while her husband is a distant man of letters, immersed in his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. The pro-Eliot side countered with unflattering attacks on Vivien as a pill-popping addict. This collection presents a far more balanced view of that legendary union. Both Eliot and Vivien were aware of the suffering they were causing each other. Both held vast amounts of guilt too. Consider this chilling letter from Eliot to John Middleton Murry:

In the last ten years . . . I have made myself into a machine. I have done it deliberately—in order to endure, in order not to feel—but it has killed V. In leaving the bank I hope to become less a machine—but yet I am frightened—because I don't know what it will do to me—and to V.—should I come alive again. I have deliberately killed my senses—in order to go with the outward form of living—This I did in 1915.

Likewise, there is Vivien's equally tortured confession, made to her physician.

When I think of all that my husband has done for me, and of all the life I smashed up (as I do think of it, all night and much of the day) I do not know why I don't go out and hang myself.

Vivien, as noted, gave *Criterion* its name, one inspired by a local restaurant in the couple's London neighborhood. She also contributed short stories and sketches to the publication, a number of them satirizing the pretentious literary crowd that the Eliots socialized with. Her letters, for all their agony, give this book some sorely needed humor. That includes the ones lampooning the poet Marianne Moore, whom Vivien regularly mocks as “Marriannnnne Moooooore.” (It seems Moore had rejected one of Vivien's stories for *The Dial*. Plus, Eliot considered Moore a promising American poet.) Eliot thought his wife had real artistic talent and hoped she would cultivate it by taking some writing courses. Vivien, for her part, considered her writing a “flash in the pan,” and remained unimpressed by both the literary crowd around *Criterion* and, as the biographer Peter Ackroyd speculates, with her husband's travails over the journal itself. In Vivien's mind, editing a literary journal did not have to be an occasion for so much melodrama.

Congratulations for this volume must go to its co-editor, Hugh Haughton, to the general editor John Haffenden, and especially to Valerie Eliot (née Fletcher), the poet's second wife, who in the 1950s came up with the idea for a letters collection. Eliot agreed to such a volume, but only if Valerie was the editor.

Up to 1925, we now have 1,600 pages of letters behind us. Ahead is Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, the writing of such landmark poetry as “Ash

Wednesday,” “The Rock,” and “Four Quartets,” the separation from Vivien in the late 1930s, the beginning of his dramatic efforts with *Murder in the Cathedral*, the winning of both the Nobel Prize and the Order of Merit in 1948, the years of worldwide fame, the production of *The Cocktail Party* on Broadway, and the happiness found in his second marriage to his former secretary, Valerie Fletcher. We are in the midst of a monumental literary undertaking. Or, as Andrew Lytle liked to say, the dead are always with us. Taken together with the poetry, essays, drama, and social criticism, this letters collection, when completed, will confirm what serious readers have known all along: it’s still the Age of Eliot, after all.

V.5 The Young Man and His Corona

The Letters of Ernest Hemingway: Volume 1: 1907–1922. Sandra Spanier and Roger W. Trogon, editors. New York: Cambridge University Press.

(2011)

The older Ernest Hemingway did not like writing letters. Time was running short and letter writing took away time and skill from projects at hand. Hemingway, the world’s most famous author, also disliked that people in possession of his letters sold them for money, and so he instructed that a letter collection never be published. Was he serious? In 1981, twenty years after his death, a collection indeed was in print, as his widow, Mary, overruled her late husband. Hemingway’s most famous biographer, Carlos Baker, and Hemingway’s youngest son, Patrick, agreed with the decision. Or, as Patrick concluded, if his father didn’t want his letters published, he could have had them burned.

And so, the Great Enterprise is underway, a multivolume collection that when completed will tell much of the story of twentieth-century literature. At first, I didn’t think it was a major volume. After all, Hemingway is only twenty-three years old when it ends. But that’s not the case. The full man emerges as the young Hemingway, very much his father’s son, plunges headfirst into life: fishing, hunting, skiing, and boxing, all combined with a love of high culture shown by references to Picasso and major composers and pianists of the day: Mischa Levitzki, Josef Hoffman, Sergei Rachmaninov, and Ossip Gabrilovich. There is also Hemingway’s apprentice work at both *The Kansas City Star* and *The Toronto Star*. Hemingway’s parents, like all those in the burgeoning middle class, had wanted their eldest son to attend college. Hemingway briefly thought it over. But no college campus could hold this restless young man. Hemingway loved to read and write; he would plow his way through the Western canon on his own. Plus, he was multilingual, born with a talent to digest foreign languages. Whether in Italy, France, or Spain, Hemingway absorbed and learned the native tongue. With newspaper work, Hemingway didn’t need college to hone his writing skills. And when he wasn’t fishing (the sport he loved above all others), Hemingway enjoyed banging

out these playful, boisterous, serious letters on his trusty Corona typewriter. (That machine, we can confidently say, was his favorite companion). This book, then, can be read as a warm-up by the young newspaperman for the glory to come, similar to the young William Faulkner trying out his own budding skills in numerous letters from Paris to his parents in Mississippi. Here, the Hemingway persona begins to take shape. First, there is the triumphant Hemingway on a fishing trip:

The other night I caught three rainbow trout that weighed 6 lb., 5 ½lb. and 3 ½lb., 1 lb. respectively also two lb. brook trout in Horton's Bay. That is the largest catch of trout that has ever been made.

Along the same lines, the young journalist in a letter to his sister boasts about another skill he was soon to master.

I hate to leave here as I've had a bludy good rime and written some really priceless yarns. You know sometimes I really do thank that I will be heller of a good writer some day. Every once in a while I knock off a yarn that is so bludy good I can't figure how I ever wrote it. I'll bring the carbons down to show you all. Everything good takes time and it takes time to be a writer, but by Gad I'm going to be one some day.

On a more tender note, there is the self-assured Hemingway, back from World War I, boosting the confidence of a teenage pen pal, one "Sister Luke," a girl from northern Michigan.

I told all the family about what a peach you were and how you can ride and dance and swim and do everything just a whole lot better than anybody else and what a good scout you are and how good looking you are how much of the old think bean you have and oh everything. Then I raved about you when I took tea with Isabel Simmons this aft. Everybody in the middle west will know that Stein Hemingway has a sister up North named Luke that is pretty darned nice.

The drama of this book comes from Hemingway's service in World War I. In Hemingway's case, the myth seems to outrun the man, at least in the eyes of cynics. However, the legendary Hemingway courage was real, not only in World War I, but in other conflicts where he saw action: the Greco-Turkish War, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II. In that war, a general traveling with the novelist declared Hemingway to be one of the bravest men he ever knew. When World War I broke out, Hemingway was determined to serve, even if only as a volunteer ambulance driver. Hemingway did not want to be one of those men, once the war was over, who could not say that they saw action. In one skirmish, the injured Hemingway rushed to the aid of a fallen comrade, someone

whose wounds were less than the driver's. Both men were saved and the young Hemingway became a national hero in Italy, receiving a silver medal of valor, which as he proudly described it, earned him a ten-minute ovation at a public ceremony. Hemingway enjoyed the adulation, but he had already acquired the tragic sense of war. Like many veterans, Hemingway may have felt guilty about surviving the war while the flower of European manhood perished in the gas-soaked trenches. "All the heroes are dead," he wrote to his parents at age nineteen. "And how much better to die in all the happy period of undisillusioned youth, to go out in a blaze of light, than to have your body worn out and old and illusions shattered." The landmark 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms* was already forming in his mind.

As important, the war helped to turn Hemingway into a full-fledged expatriate. After the armistice, Hemingway returned to Illinois, courted several young ladies, married an older woman, Hadley Richardson, and continued his journalism career, this time with *The Toronto Star*. Events, however, were pulling him back to Europe. The lives of Hemingway and William Faulkner are, in many ways, parallel: both were published in the 1920s, both received critical acclaim in the 1930s. Hemingway was more accessible and more popular, but by the 1950s, both had won the Nobel Prize, enjoying rock star-style fame. And when both men were starting out, Sherwood Anderson was considered the champ of American fiction. He was also the first of many selfless authors to assist the ambitious Hemingway. The entry for the author of *Winesburg, Ohio* in the Roster of Correspondents leaps out at the reader. "Following his own trip to Paris (in 1921), Anderson suggested to EH that he move to Paris to pursue serious writing . . ." Anderson, of course, gave virtually the same advice to the young Faulkner, then learning his craft in New Orleans: go back to Mississippi and write about your postage stamp. Faulkner was glad to stick with Jefferson County, while Hemingway conquered first Paris, then much of the rest of the planet. The men responded to Anderson in different ways: Faulkner with an appreciative 1925 essay of Anderson's canon in *The Dallas Morning News*, Hemingway with the parody *The Torrents of Spring*. Either way, Anderson's wise counsel helped to shape the direction of American literature.

Paris was where Hemingway took root. Not just Anderson, but Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and F. Scott Fitzgerald all showed unfailing support to the young poet/short story writer. Once Hemingway began to publish short fiction, it was Fitzgerald who enthusiastically championed him to Maxwell Perkins at Scribner and Sons. You can't deny the generosity of these writers who had some, but not all, of Hemingway's own competitiveness, one that rarely allowed the latter to say nice things about living authors.

That surliness was deeper into the future. It occasionally flashes here, especially when Hemingway disparages the success T.S. Eliot was enjoying with "The Waste Land." Mostly, this volume shows a young writer at his freewheeling best, one chock-full of fun letters that displayed a genuine sweetness to his

parents, siblings, and friends. Younger readers will especially profit from this book. To experience such energy will inspire the younger reader; it may even make them want to do plenty of reading and writing for themselves.

V.6 Walk Like a Man: The Early Novels of Richard Price

(2013)

In the movie adaptation of Richard Price's 1974 novel, *The Wanderers*, the opening scene shows a character from the film, Joey Capra, racing through the hallways of a large Bronx, New York, public high school while the Four Seasons classic *Walk Like a Man* blares in the background. You couldn't come up with a more appropriate tune. Manhood—whether it is thrust upon a youngster or whether it remains a failure—is a theme of *The Wanderers* and Price's other early novels.

Richard Price has traveled far from the North Bronx to the world of literary, and, later, film and television writing success. In interviews, Price has expressed amazement that he ever got away with those gritty early novels. Influenced heavily by Lenny Bruce, Price wrote with abandon about his multi-ethnic world. Rage runs throughout those novels, and frustrated characters find plenty of targets for their insecurities. Later on, Price chose the fictional Dempsey, New Jersey, as his own Yoknapatawpha County. But the early novels—*The Wanderers*, *Bloodbrothers*, *Ladies' Man*, and *The Breaks*—remain my favorite works. All have remained in print. In those works, he achieved a necessary goal of the novelist: putting a human face on characters from that increasingly obscure borough, home to Yankee Stadium and the Bronx Zoo, and once the symbol (“the South Bronx”) of urban decay in America.

In *The Wanderers* and *Bloodbrothers*, Price was so adept at depicting working-class Italian-American life that I thought his name was the Americanization of some Italian surname, Palermo or Palumbo, maybe. But no. In an interview published in a 2007 paperback version of *Bloodbrothers*, Price guessed that the only reason his characters were Italian was that his friends' families were more dramatic than his own. The Wanderers were Perry LaGuardia, Joey Capra, Richie Gennaro, Eugene Caputo, and Buddy Borsalino. All but Eugene lived in a North Bronx project. The theme is the typical boy-to-man journey, one more harrowing than any pop song. *The Wanderers* are tough but frightened. They bond as brothers against the world—not just against other gangs, but also against parents, girlfriends, teachers, and the public-school factories. None are would-be criminals; they can only hope to escape the world closing in on them. Perry, the big man, and Joey, the small, shifty halfback, are the closest. Manhood is forced upon them. In Perry's case, his father is dead of a heart attack. Later, his mother, whom he is close to, dies of the same disease after being trapped in a housing project elevator. Joey, meanwhile, is the only son of a former Mr. New York City turned New York City fireman. Emilio is disgusted by his scrawny

son. He literally beats him into shape until one day when Joey fights back and cracks a wine bottle over his father's head. After his mother's death, the orphaned Perry decides to join the Merchant Marine. Joey tags along. Manhood achieved. Buddy and Eugene come to manhood the hard way. A romantic, Buddy gets involved with a loose teenager whom he impregnates and then dutifully marries. Eugene, on the other hand, has to live up to his father, a would-be ladies' man. Eugene has one conquest after another. However, a fight with Joey shatters his budding manhood. The battle-scarred Wanderer easily wallops the spoiled Eugene. In a dramatic scene, Eugene allows a girlfriend, Nina Becker, out into the Bronx night for a cigarette. Nina is apprehended and sexually assaulted. Eugene breaks in on the act, mumbles "excuse me" and runs off. Eugene is then sternly lectured, not by his braggart father, but by his long-suffering mother. "Some day, my son, you will learn that the two greatest joys of being a man are beating the hell out of someone and getting the hell beat out of *you*." Nina gives him a similar tongue-lashing, bitterly denouncing his lack of manhood. Like many a working-class youth, Eugene compensates by joining the Marines. Only Richie fails at achieving manhood. Being warlord of the Wanderers is his life. With a steady girl and status in the world of Bronx gangdom, he doesn't think of the future. By the spring of their senior year in high school, the other Wanderers know that adolescence is over. Adulthood will not be postponed by four years of college but embraced by typical working-class means: time in the service or in Buddy's case, a blue-collar job. Only Richie takes gang life so seriously.

The Wanderers was set in 1962 America, pre-Vietnam War and before "the '60s" as commonly understood. By the mid-1970s, the time period of Price's second novel, *Bloodbrothers*, many Bronxites had found refuge in Co-op City, a sprawling apartment complex in the North Bronx. By then, more and more Americans were attending college. Still, for much of ethnic New York, outdoor blue-collar work—in this case, construction work as an electrician—is a reasonable ideal. *The Wanderers* is about gang life, loyal but transient. *Bloodbrothers* presents something far more gripping: family life in terms of father-son, uncle-nephew, and older brother-younger brother relationships. The clash is symbolic: manly construction work versus "sissy" work as a hospital aide. Eighteen-year-old Stony DeCoco, the novel's hero, opts for the latter. His father, Tommy, and uncle Chubby have both followed their father into the tight-knit world of construction workers. Stony's next. But he balks. Stony's mother, Marie, has a miserable life. She once fancied a singing career, but like most women of the 1940s and '50s, she opted for marriage and children. Marie's beloved mother has passed away; plus, she is stuck with a philandering husband who also humiliates her when necessary. So Marie takes it out on Albert, a nine-year-old suffering from anorexia. The joker in the deck is Stony's younger brother, Albert. Albert's only hope is Stony, the boy-man who loves his younger brother. On a brother-and-brother trip to Times Square, Albert is at ease with himself, eating well and acting perfectly normal. Through Albert's doctor,

Stony gets a job in a children's ward of a Bronx hospital. For Stony, manhood has arrived. He knows what he wants: a career as a hospital counselor, complete with a college degree.

Written when Price was twenty-five, *Bloodbrothers*, to me, is one of the best-plotted novels of recent times. Stony is forced to make a deal with his father: two weeks at the hospital, then two weeks on the construction job. After that, at age eighteen, he must decide what he wants to do with his life. The fast, fast novel continues with plot on top of plot. Stony loves hospital work; he likes the company of hard hats too.

Then there is Stony's uncle Chubby. Chubby is all family. He idolizes his late father. A homebody, he is comfortable in Co-op City. As a high schooler, Chubby was a legendary baseball star, but he is too attached to home to even have a tryout with the lowly St. Louis Browns. A skirt-chaser like Tommy, Chubby suffers a heart attack in a Times Square house of ill repute. This convinces him to be completely loyal to his own long-suffering wife, Phyllis. Meanwhile, Stony finishes construction work and promptly tells the old man he's going back to the hospital. Tommy, typically enough, finds another barroom pickup. Marie, meanwhile, is so fed up that she has her own affair with a local mama's boy. The boy's mother phones the wrong DeCoco phone number and Chubby, thinking, incredibly enough, that Phyllis is fooling around, clobbers her. On the Sunday before the big decision day, Tommy and Stony clean up the apartment. Impressed by his son's manliness, Tommy gives in and tells Stony that hospital work is fine. But Stony's family ties are too strong. Comforting his uncle only tightens those bonds. Wandering Co-op City, he gets into a fight with a night watchman and decides to stick with construction work. "He'll never say no to his father," Stony's girlfriend, Annette, confides to a mutual friend.

Bloodbrothers is a vivid portrait of 1970s life, namely that of working-class kids on their own. Stony's friends all have a job, a place, and a car: that's all they need. Being out in the world is everything. Stony wants to join them. It's just not possible. How could he leave Albert behind to the nerves of his crazed mother?

Price published his next novel, *Ladies' Man* (1978) at age twenty-eight. The first two novels were written in third person. They were fast enough, but *Ladies' Man* being written in first person was similar to Saul Bellow writing *The Adventures of Augie March* after the third-person efforts of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. In both cases, there is liberation in the prose narrative. The hero, Kenny Becker, like Price, is the product of a Bronx housing project. *The Wanderers* and *Bloodbrothers* both mirror the old America in that eighteen is the cut-off age for manhood. *Ladies' Man* is more typical. Thirty is the big number. Becker is a college dropout who makes a living as a door-to-door salesman. Still, he pays for singing lessons for his live-in girlfriend, La Donna, even though she has no chance of success. A bibliophile, Becker fantasizes about being an English teacher, but he can't even muster up the gumption to finish his last semester of college. When La Donna walks out on Kenny, her loser boyfriend, Kenny goes on a hilarious

romp through the seedy Manhattan singles scene: singles bars, peep shows, more houses of ill repute. It works because Becker, loser or no loser, is a sincere guy. Full of rage, he wants to find fulfillment. Price is at his peak in this novel. Metaphors abound: "I stood there like Dondi." "I came out sounding like Andy Devine." "I grinned like a Mexican bandit." "I gave her my best Marcello."

Kenny's loserdom is highlighted by a chance encounter with his high school mates. One friend, Donny, is just as despondent. He dislikes his job and, like Becker, only finds fun in debauchery. (Becker does want more.) Another pal, Candy, is proud of his life: a shoe store in the prosperous West Village, a wife and three children, a big car and a house in the ritzy Five Towns area of Long Island. But Candy is helplessly overweight and headed for a bad ending. When the threesome visit their old haunts in the Bronx, Kenny breaks down. "All we've done since then was dying," he maintains. A typical theme also. High school with the thrill of music and girls is the high point of a man's life. Candy, however, snarls back that he has kids and they're the tops. Overweight or not, Candy is the adult of the three.

Both *Bloodbrothers* and *Ladies' Man* end on Sunday evenings. Out of work, Kenny has an interview set for Monday for an adult back-to-school program at reputable Fordham University. The reader is left in suspense: does Stony go back to the hospital when he wakes up on Monday morning? If so, what happens to Albert? Does Kenny go through with the college interview? He parties away a Saturday night with Donny. The next morning, a super-lonely Sunday, Kenny does his usual 150 sit-ups. The prospects for a productive Monday are dismal.

I started shouting, "Huh!" Huh!" with every sit-up. My lower back was red hot. Teacher! Teacher! Teach who! With what! I was a . . . ding dong salesman. . . . Teacher.

By not going back to school, Kenny may be avoiding manhood. Truth is, however, is that he is a good salesman, often ringing up his daily dollar quota by early afternoon or before. That's about as optimistic as one can get about Becker.

In the final novel to date of Price's Bronx tales, Peter Keller, hero of *The Breaks* is the man Becker wasn't. Well, almost. Unlike Becker, Keller has graduated from college. Becker-like, however, he parties before taking a pre-law exam, flunks the test and must wait another year before taking it again. Which he never does. Becker's friends wonder why "Kenny the Riffer," the high school joke man for the in-crowd, hasn't made it to Vegas as a comic. Keller, in fact, takes the plunge, finishing up *The Breaks* with a successful amateur night routine in the West Village. *The Breaks* marks the end of an era. On page 73, Price takes his leave of his native Bronx. As with hundreds of thousands of Bronxites, a changing borough has driven the Kellers to the bucolic suburbs, in this case Yonkers. Breathe that country air! Keller, too, has his rage. This has to do with his adult failures but also with his mother's death and a stepmother he dislikes. After a

brush with the law, it's off to his upstate alma mater where he snags a job teaching freshman composition.

Here is a Price character already in the middle-class world, light-years from the world of Perry and Joey. In the chapter "Limoniumsville," Peter gets involved with Kimberly, the estranged wife of Tony Fonseca, a teacher and author. Fonseca, too, struggles with manhood. His one book of short stories is all that he will publish. That, too, leads to bouts of rage. But he is also a teacher and a good one at that. A safe university job will save his manhood. Plus, the estrangement is temporary. Tony and Kimberly get back together and Pete is left to happily pursue the entertainment business in Manhattan. After a confrontation with Fonseca and the realization that his fling was a non-starter, manhood comes easily for Keller. Even as a freshman composition teacher, he has reached a station that Becker can only dream about. Unlike Stony, Keller is not held hostage by family life. Moving with his family from the Bronx to Yonkers and then on his own to upstate and back to the city, he has avoided the crushing weight of housing project life so vividly displayed in *The Wanderers*. Writing in *The New York Times*, Benjamin DeMott saw little hope for Keller. Does he make it on just one standup act? Maybe, maybe not. But like Perry and Joey and Eugene, he's already on his own. That's step one.

After *The Breaks*, Price reportedly wrote fiction that he felt wasn't good enough to publish. (One rumored manuscript, *Speedo*, allegedly concerned a standup comic.) Price began writing such successful screenplays as *The Color of Money* and *Sea of Love*. In the early nineties, it was back to fiction, with 1992's *Clockers*. But in a different world, different locales. The city fiction had all the stuff of fine literature: novel after novel chock-full of that cover-to-cover tension as the boy thrusts himself into manhood. Price's early work makes the case for working-class fiction. For many of the characters, there is no guarantee of college tuition from the folks. Decisions made at a youthful age have the utmost consequences.

V.7 All of America

D. T. Max. Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace. New York: Viking.

(2013)

David Foster Wallace was a novelist born to the breed. His father was a Ph.D. in philosophy from Cornell University. His mother was a college English teacher who once won a Professor of the Year award. As a student in Urbana, Illinois, Wallace piled up scholarly awards and top marks. At Amherst University, he achieved the dream of every depresso creative writing student in America: he had his undergraduate effort published as a novel—1987's *The Broom of the System*. But Wallace had demons to contend with. Suicide and depression ran in

his family. Even as a top-notch undergraduate, Wallace, on several occasions, had to be taken home by his parents for bouts of recovery. Wallace's life was a tragedy, but his career was a triumph. A reader during the Age of Updike, Wallace, like most middle-class bibliophiles, read that prolific novelist. He enjoyed Updike's fiction, but it did not make a decisive impression. Instead, Wallace found greater inspiration from such postmodernists as Donald Barthelme and especially Thomas Pynchon. Further influences came from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the criticism of Jacques Derrida and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wallace did not dismiss theory: he thought of it as having great importance to the foundation of any good fiction.

Wallace was a man of great intensity. Examples abound in D. T. Max's biography: frustrated professors would allegedly walk out of the classroom rather than put up with this hotshot's incessant questioning. Later a teacher himself, Wallace would read student themes three times over before making extensive commentary. Wallace placed a great emphasis on grammar, often leaving the classroom to phone his mother on some pedagogical question, while also imploring his charges to, above all, avoid the use of dangling participles. As a writer, Wallace was a force of nature. Max claims that Wallace, on one inspired day, knocked out no less than 25,000 words in one sitting. One paragraph in one piece of fiction ran for a full twenty-seven pages.

The novelist, early in his career, found refuge at the Yaddo Foundation, a writer's colony in upstate New York. That made for an interesting encounter. The young Wallace became friends with the firmly established novelist Jay McInerney. The 80s met the 90s. McInerney, the novelist for the booming 80s, as pictured on the back cover of his novel *The Story of My Life*: three-piece suit, blow-dried pompadour, a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* tucked neatly under his arm, and Wallace, the '90s grunge novelist with unshaven beard, long hair, a huge bandanna and untied work boots. (I don't choose sides, read 'em both.)

With *Infinite Jest*, Wallace solidified his standing as a phenom. He also became an influence on modern fiction. In the 80s, the minimalists, led by Raymond Carver, seemed to rule the roost. *Infinite Jest*, a 1,097-page baggy-pants of a novel, helped to push that moment overboard, ushering in a period of maximalist fiction, exemplified by sprawling works of Wallace, William Vollmann, Jeffrey Eugenides, Rick Moody, Dave Eggers, and others. Wallace was a child of postmodernism. He was also uneasy about its influence. With black humor and surrealism, postmodernism tended towards a bleak cynicism. Wallace rejected that, declaring that fiction must seek affirmation in the human condition. Here Wallace had more in common with such traditional novelists as Updike and Saul Bellow than with, say, Kurt Vonnegut. Echoing Tom Wolfe, Wallace called for writers to devour "all of America," to jump into the carnival of American life and produce those big, juicy fictions worthy of its frenzied experience. At the same time, Wallace grew increasingly pessimistic over the American prospect

(he disliked email and was disgusted over America's television addiction). Much of his work slid into the cynicism he disliked.

Even though I found *Infinite Jest* rough going (it has more long sentences than any novel I know of since *Intruder in the Dust*, plus it's about 700 pages longer), I do agree with Max's assessment of Wallace's best work. Like many novelists, Wallace was a prolific journalist, bringing a dramatic effect to any event he was commissioned to cover. My favorite is Wallace's long report on an Illinois state fair, published as "Ticket to the Fair" in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. In his day, Wallace was more than a writing phenom: he was also a media curiosity, the hip novelist who lived, not in the East Village or the Bay Area, but instead in the Midwest, where he taught at Illinois State University in Bloomington. The state fair was the perfect beat. Wallace understood the sheer day in, day out loneliness rural people face and how a trip to something as mundane as a state fair was a huge adventure. He also understood how rural youth, with not much to look forward to except low-paying service jobs, could get a decent thrill at seeing one of their own whip the tar out of a city slicker pugilist in a prizefight.

Like Max, I also believe that one of Wallace's great fiction efforts was the Chris Fogle chapter in Wallace's unfinished novel, *The Pale King*. Fogle, the ultimate 70s youth, a suburban "wasteoid," the product of a broken family, evolves as a young man who finally matures when he redeems his father's untimely death by becoming an IRS agent. Wallace's publishers considered printing that chapter as a separate volume, similar to the way the first chapter in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, which fictionalizes the famous 1951 playoff game between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, was published as *Pafko at the Wall*. (I still think it's a terrific idea.) In "Ticket to the Fair," Wallace claimed that he didn't feel like a Midwesterner anymore. Was it so? Wallace was not a native of the region. He grew up in Illinois as the son of a college professor. But as Richard Price once put it, you can be from only one place on this Earth, and for Wallace, it was that rural Illinois he captured so vividly in "Ticket to the Fair." *The Pale King* is set in Peoria, the quintessential Middle America town, as the novelist, in confronting that American malady boredom, attempts to put a human face on those benighted IRS agents.

Wallace's all-too-brief life was a struggle by a prodigiously talented man to confront "the pain of being himself." He admired Brian Moore's book *The Catholics* and he kept a copy of the St. Francis serenity prayer in his study. Sadly, such attempts at understanding could not prevail. Wallace's death was a tragedy, as were the events leading up to it. By then—and into the future—the critical reception was underway: book-length studies of his work, an interview collection, a reader's guide to *Infinite Jest*, plus essays and symposiums and even a book about one of Wallace's book-signing tours. *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story* makes the case for Wallace as a pivotal figure in late twentieth-century American fiction, a writer who put a much-needed boost of energy back into the novel.

V.8 What It Takes: The Larry Brown Story

Conversations With Larry Brown. Edited by Jay Watson. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

(2007)

The life and career of Larry Brown, the American novelist who died of a heart attack at age fifty-three in 2004, was both sad and inspiring. His passing was the most untimely one in American literature since Flannery O'Connor's death in 1964. Brown, as they say down South, came up hard. His family moved from Lafayette County, Mississippi, to Memphis when Brown, a sharecropper's son, was still in grade school. (In the 1950s, this was a journey not uncommon among rural folk. At around the same time, Elvis Presley's family made the same trip.) The family eventually moved back to Mississippi, but without Brown's father. During their senior year at Lafayette County High School, Brown and his friends had to think long and hard about their futures. The Vietnam War raged on, and few boys from rural Mississippi had the college option as a way to avoid the draft. Instead of subjecting himself to the draft, Brown took the plunge after high school and joined the U.S. Marines, becoming a leatherneck. Discharged in 1972, Brown toiled briefly as a factory worker before becoming a fireman with the Oxford, Mississippi, fire department. (Like many veterans, he grew his hair long following discharge. His superiors told him to lose the long hair before joining the department. Which he did.) Along the way, he became a husband and a father to a family that grew to three children, two boys and a girl. In the early 1980s, something else happened: Brown decided to become a writer. The seed was planted in Brown's youth by his mother, who encouraged her children to read. Mrs. Brown introduced her offspring to classic literature, especially the dramatic tales from ancient Greece. It's a poignant tale. The Browns had little money to buy books, but they *did* have a library card. Never in recent American literature would a public library card seem so important.

After years of reading, Brown, as he turned thirty, began to wonder if all this might translate into some writing of his own. He borrowed his wife's Smith-Corona typewriter and soon the novels and short stories began tumbling out. Brown's tale is funny too. Once he became famous, he claimed to have written an unpublished novel that was 327 single-spaced pages long. Brown told his interviewer he didn't know any better than to double-space his manuscripts. The rejection letters piled up.

A turning point was reached in 1982. That's when Brown audited a writing course at Ole Miss under the tutelage of the novelist Ellen Douglas. Douglas introduced Brown to the masters of short fiction: Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Joseph Conrad, Raymond Carver, and Flannery O'Connor. Instead of pumping out pulp thrillers, Brown now turned out a more literary fiction. In 1983 alone, Brown estimated that he wrote no less than thirty-nine short

stories. Living in Oxford, hometown of William Faulkner, a place where the Faulkner legend dominates the local culture, helped too. The still-unknown Brown struck up acquaintances not only with Douglas but also with other novelists: Barry Hannah and Richard Ford, plus Richard Horworth, the proprietor of Square Books, one of the finest independent bookstores in the South. As important, Oxford provided Brown friendships with a community of writers and readers who respected and encouraged serious writing. Oxford attracts writers the way New York City, during the 1920s, attracted artists of all stripes from the hinterlands. Think also of the young Faulkner finding a refuge in the colorful New Orleans of that same decade, striking up his own friendship with Sherwood Anderson, who set the novelist on his way, famously telling Faulkner to give up the big city and instead cultivate that little postage stamp in his home state.

Brown was a native of Faulkner country. He was also smart enough not to try to write like Faulkner. During his growing-up years, Brown claimed to have only read *Big Woods* from the vast Faulkner canon. By the mid-1980s, Brown's prolific apprentice years were bearing fruit. He began publishing short stories, and one effort, "Facing the Music," published in *Mississippi Review* caught the attention of Shannon Ravenel, an editor at Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, a house founded by Louis D. Rubin, that tireless champion of southern letters. She called Brown and asked if he had more stories. To which the laconic Brown famously replied, "Yeah, I got about a hundred. How many do you want to see?" And so he was on his way. His first short story collection appeared in 1986, followed by a string of knockout novels, *Dirty Work*, *Joe*, and *Fay*; another short story collection, *Big Bad Love*; and *On Fire*, his near-perfect memoir of his fire-fighting days. *On Fire* is the best book about firefighting since Dennis Smith's 1971 classic, *Report From Engine Co. 82*. The book is about more than the routines of firefighting. It is about becoming a man. That is, a man with courage. There are times in a man's life, Brown observes, when courage must prevail, if only to allow that man to live with himself. In fact, Brown declares that above all, a fireman, although he might be a thief, a crook, or even a child molester, can never be a coward. All throughout *On Fire*, Brown proudly proclaims his love for the job, not just the tools of the trade—"I love my old torn-up boots, the toes skinned and burned, my wrinkled gloves, sootstreaked and charred, my dirty coat and frayed torn pants"—but what it represents.

I never had a feeling any better than I had when driving my big pumper through the streets of Oxford at three or four in the morning, while everybody was sleeping, while the streets were deserted except for an occasional police cruiser, with the lights flashing just yellow caution at the intersections, wheeling that big red truck like all little boys would like to and some will grow up to, like me, and knowing that they were all asleep while we

were up, taking care of the city of my birth, watching over them if they needed us. I know that sounds sappy as hell. I don't give a ---- if it does.

From 1986 to 2004, there was no finer writer of fiction in America than Larry Brown. To me, there were times when it seemed that Brown was keeping the entire enterprise afloat. It's only an exaggeration. At the same time, Larry Brown, as Barry Hannah claimed, grew as a writer from passion to brilliance. I'd add that he brought a sorely needed innocence and enthusiasm to the increasingly despairing game of American literature. His dedication to his craft recalled an earlier, more heroic era. Like any serious craftsman, Brown wrote and rewrote his fiction drafts. His 2000 novel, *Fay*, totaled, for instance, 1,024 pages in all. But he did all that on a manual typewriter. The same was true of all his work from the early 1980s onward. After *Fay*, however, Brown decided to give the personal computer a chance.

Like Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck, Brown was not a college graduate. He even flunked his senior high school English class. After several false starts, Brown zeroed in on his native Lafayette County as a locale for fiction. He became, in time, the reigning champion of "Grit Lit." Larry Brown's universe comprises mostly blue-collar workers, folks who live for small pleasures: cigarettes and six-packs, roadside joints, and, yes, trailer parks. Just by introducing this world into the prosperous 1980s and '90s, Brown, as Ezra Pound once demanded of good literature, makes it new. Consider Fay Jones, heroine of Brown's 2000 novel of the same first name. In 1985 Mississippi, Fay, a striking blonde teenager escaping her abusive father, sets out on the road, aiming to hitchhike from Oxford to Biloxi. She leaves home with all of two dollars in her hand. Early in the novel, she happens across a local church. There, she donates one of her bills. So it's off to Biloxi with a dollar. But think of the year: 1985. What comes to mind? An America living in the midst of enormous technological change, a time of economic prosperity, of personal computers, cable television, a booming stock market, microwave ovens, VCRs, and all the material things (and more) that anyone could desire. No one imagines a 1985 America where a teenage girl hitchhikes from one end of a state—even the poorest one—with a dollar in her hand, while, in the end, getting her way. For that, we need the novelist's imagination.

In his fiction, Brown gives his characters a chance to redeem their lives, to do right by others. The men who look after Fay Jones think they are doing just that. This is especially true in Brown's finest novel, 1991's *Joe*. Here, Brown introduces us to the Jones family, of which Fay is a member. Brown's largest moral hero is a most unlikely one. Joe Ransom, a lifelong resident of north Mississippi, works outdoors as a seasonal laborer. He rises before dawn, a supervisor for a crew that replaces old pines with new trees. Not much else is happening in his life. He still hangs out with the same crowd he grew up with. A divorced

man, Joe is occasionally visited by his ex-wife. She's on the up and up, working in an office and quitting smoking. Joe grumbles that his estranged daughter is pregnant by an unnamed man. Meanwhile, Joe's lady friend is a woman his own daughter's age.

Joe is a candidate for redemption. He finds it in the person of Gary Jones, Fay's younger brother. Let no one say Larry Brown can't shock his readers. Fay hitchhikes throughout Mississippi with a single dollar. Gary, similarly, knows nothing about the modern world. A reliable field hand, Gary is a teenage boy who has never used a toothbrush or a bar of soap; nor has he witnessed images from a television set. He knows nothing of the opposite sex either. Joe and Gary meet when Gary and his father find work on the tree crew. The old man won't work, but Joe is impressed by Gary's desire to toil all day under the hot Mississippi sun. Joe takes Gary under his wing. Gary, in turn, begins to grow up. He learns how to drive; he works hard and earns enough money to buy ice cream for his little sister. Think of him as a Holden Caulfield without the prep school dropout experience: another innocent with no time for the phonies of the world. Gary is on his way to adulthood. Plus, he cares for his siblings. And by serving as a surrogate father for Gary and his sister, Joe finally squeezes some meaning into his own life.

As he acknowledged in a later interview, Brown became the voice of such people. The world of Joe and Gary is often more interesting than that of middle-class angst. In their daily lives, working people have no margin for error. They have little money. Larry Brown's people assiduously clip out newspaper coupons, they maintain second jobs; they worry endlessly over the mileage on their automobiles. Like Gary Jones, they have to work hard at manual labor just to grab a minor footing in the world. In all, Brown's fiction gave a human face to folks that Americans don't see on the television screen or in the movie theatres, except, usually, in a derogatory manner—as peckerwoods, rednecks in trailer parks, all of this now America's most acceptable prejudice.

The Larry Brown story is a melancholy one. There was his success as a novelist: the son of a sharecropper who was the only two-time winner of the Southern Book Critics Circle Award, a writer whose work was published in several foreign languages, one whose short story "Big Bad Love" became an acclaimed motion picture, and, finally, someone who lectured and gave readings on prestigious college campuses throughout the country, including delivering the second annual Thomas Wolfe Lecture at the University of North Carolina.

Brown was aware of his powers. In another interview, he regularly cited William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Perhaps he realized his standing as a successor to those two giants in the grand pantheon of southern literature. Larry Brown's death was a sudden and sad event, a great loss for literature. As with O'Connor, Wolfe, Fitzgerald, and Hart Crane—other greats who left us too soon—we'll just have to enjoy what we do have from this powerful and original artist, writing at century's end.

V.9 Mark Royden Winchell: Last of the Vanderbilt Greats

(2008)

Mark Royden Winchell's death last spring at the much too young age of fifty-nine has robbed the literary world of one of its brightest lights of the past quarter-century. Mark was an old-fashioned man of letters: essayist, biographer, editor, historian, and teacher. He was prolific, too, the author or editor of fourteen books and over 100 essays and reviews.

If Larry Brown was the greatest fiction writer to come out of the South since 1980, then Mark has to be ranked as a top non-fiction author. He took a winding route to that title. Born in Ohio, he received a B.A. degree from West Virginia University. After that, he did graduate work at Vanderbilt University. With Thomas Daniel Young and Walter Sullivan at the helm, the grand Vanderbilt tradition still had legs to it. And it surely influenced the young Winchell. After Vanderbilt, Mark taught first at Southern Mississippi University, then later at Clemson, where he made his academic home.

Mark's career followed an interesting intellectual odyssey. Among his early works were biographies of Joan Didion, Horace McCoy, William F. Buckley Jr., and Leslie Field. (Mark was a southern writer, but the books on McCoy and Field illustrate his love for the American West.) The Didion biography was published in 1980, with Winchell maintaining that the winsome Californian was now the finest essayist in all of America. Nineteen eighty-four saw his Buckley biography, published in a year when the editor of *National Review* was riding high, basking in the landslide re-election of his friend Ronald Reagan. Seven years later, in 1991, Mark published *Neoconservative Criticism*, a volume that focused on Joseph Epstein, Kenneth Lynn, and, most significantly, Norman Podhoretz. Mark, it seemed to me, was sympathetic to the cultural conservatism then enunciated by both Buckley and Podhoretz. But that brand of conservatism would soon prove insufficient.

In between those two books, in 1987, Mark co-authored the memoirs of Herman Talmadge, the longtime U.S. senator from Georgia. That Mark, a native of Ohio, would even be chosen to write a book with such a giant was testimony enough to his growing reputation. That book, one might argue, served as a bridge between the Buckley-Podhoretz worldview and the Old Right outlook Mark later championed. Talmadge, who was defeated for re-election in 1980, was one of the last of his breed: a states' rights Southern Democrat who remained in that party even after it had turned left and as the South itself was becoming heavily Republican. Talmadge was a prudent fiscal conservative whose somber view of human nature stood directly opposed to the hysterical optimism that had now overtaken the once equally somber conservative movement.

The 1990s and 2000s saw great leaps forward in Mark's output with the publication of biographies of Cleanth Brooks and Donald Davidson. Those two thick books, *Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism* and *Where No Flag Flies: Donald Davidson and the Southern Resistance*, are the ones he should be remembered

for. For they are the volumes that most clarify his worldview: a traditionalist in literature and an Old Right conservative in politics. Most of Mark's earlier biographies were around-200-page books published by Twayne. The Brooks and Davidson biographies were much more ambitious. Both were over 400 pages in length and both also placed southern literature and politics at the center of the American experience in the twentieth century.

More than ever, Mark sided with the cause of the Old Right and the conservative South. He opposed the Iraq War, and on the pages of *The American Conservative*, offered up the America First foreign policy of his fellow Ohioan Robert Taft as a proper antidote to endless foreign meddling. Mark was also a member of the League of the South, for which he published an extensive critique of the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., one that not only focused on King's plagiarism, adultery, and support for leftist politics, but one that also mourned the passing of the George Washington–Abraham Lincoln America of Mark's youth. His collection *Reinventing the South* included not only essays on William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams but a strong defense of the southern literary tradition itself, a subject he first broached in his edited tribute to Young, one entitled *The Vanderbilt Tradition*, an impressive overview that included essays on such popular authors as Jesse Stuart and Roy Blount Jr. and more formal critics, such as John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate.

Mark was prolific to the end. One of his last books showed a side that I was not aware of, a book detailing the most politically incorrect films of all time: *God, Man, & Hollywood*. The book's subtitle, *Politically Correct Cinema from 'Birth of a Nation' to 'The Passion of the Christ,'* highlighted those two films as prime examples of Hollywood's often surprising conservatism.

Above all, Mark wrote lovingly about the Vanderbilt tradition in literature. That, to me, is where his true home laid. It may also explain why he was a member of the Libertarian Party. Possibly, he disliked the world of politics he often wrote about, preferring instead a more honest and competitive Republic of Letters.

Mark was friends with many Vanderbilt writers: Brooks, Bradford, Young, Walter Sullivan, and Robert Penn Warren—Warren's was a friendship that he particularly cherished. He wrote not only of these gentlemen but also of others: Davidson and Ransom, plus Andrew Lytle and Richard M. Weaver. He defended that literary tradition as essential to both the life of the soul and of any particular nation. And when modern-day academics throughout the South, including those at Vanderbilt, came to attack the Fugitive–Agrarian movement as racist and fascist, Mark responded in kind, publishing a memorable retort, "What They Have to Say About Us," published also in *Reinventing the South*.

And so we have Mark's own legacy: as a friend, interpreter, and champion of the Vanderbilt giants, Mark, in time, became one of those greats himself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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